TMNT! x Reader | ONE-SHOT BOOK

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by deklover

Summary

Compilation of different one shots of ROTTMNT/TMNT2012/TMNT BAYVERSE/MM/TOTTMNT

[Most of them are SFW, but there are some NSFW one shots. In those cases, read under your own responsibility.]

I do not own any of the characters from the show Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles.

This work is being published in ao3, Tumblr and Wattpad. If you see it somewhere else, means it's stolen. If that's the case, I would love you to tell me. Thank you!

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Chapter 1: TIME OUT —ft. Rise!Leonardo

The dojo floor is cool beneath your bare feet, the neon lights of the lair reflecting faintly off Leo's swords as he spins them with his usual flair.

"Okay, okay," he says, grinning, "today I'm not going easy on you. You've leveled up. I can feel it."

You roll your eyes, taking your stance.
He always says that before absolutely demolishing you.

The sparring starts playful—dodges, laughter, you landing a hit to his shoulder that makes him gasp dramatically and flop back like he's in a soap opera.

"Oh no, I've been defeated. Tell my brothers I died doing what I loved: being cooler than them."

You snort and lower your guard for half a second. That's when he gets serious.

He moves fast—too fast. A blur of blue, a sudden twist, and the flat of his blade catches your wrist wrong. Not hard enough to be dangerous, but hard enough that a sharp jolt shoots up your arm.

You hiss, dropping your stance.

Leo freezes.

For a moment, he just stares—eyes wide, breath hitching, like his brain just rebooted.

"I— I— wait, are you okay? I didn't— I thought you were going to block—"

He drops his swords instantly, they clatter to the ground as he rushes over, hands hovering like he's afraid touching you might make it worse.

"Hey, hey, talk to me. On a scale from 'I'm fine' to 'Raph is going to murder me,' how bad is it?"

You try to laugh it off, but your wrist is throbbing. His usual playful confidence is completely gone.

He gently takes your hand, inspecting it like it's the most important thing in the world.

"I'm so sorry. I got carried away. I didn't mean to— I was just trying to be cool and flashy and —ugh."

He winces at himself.

"This is why Master Splinter says I need to focus."

He leads you to the bench, sitting you down and grabbing an ice pack with one hand while still holding your wrist with the other, like he's afraid to let go.

"You're not allowed to be hurt. That's against the rules."

You blink. "What rules?"

"My rules."

He presses the ice gently against your wrist, his touch surprisingly careful for someone who usually acts like a walking anime protagonist.

"Next time, we're slowing it down. Or I'm using foam swords. Or pillows. Or nothing. We can just... sit and talk."

He glances up at you, eyes soft.

"I don't want you getting hurt because of me. Ever."

For a second, he's not the dramatic show-off ninja. He's just a worried teenage boy who feels awful for hurting someone he cares about.

You tell him you're fine. That it was an accident. He exhales slowly, tension leaving his shoulders, but he still doesn't let go of your hand.

"Okay. But if Raph finds out, I'm blaming you for not blocking."

A tiny grin returns, but it's gentler now. He sits beside you, shoulder brushing yours.

"Training's over for today. Doctor Leo has prescribed snacks and bad movies."

Chapter 2: SYSTEM ERROR —ft. Rise!Donatello

The lab smells faintly of solder and cleaning solution, a familiar comfort as Donnie circles you like a scientist observing a rare specimen.

"Okay," he says, adjusting his goggles, "statistically, you should have improved by 12.6% since last week. Let's test that hypothesis."

You groan. "You could just say 'let's spar.'"

"Where's the fun in that?"

He activates the training drones, and the room fills with the hum of machinery. Donnie moves with calculated precision, staff spinning, every movement planned three steps ahead.

You manage to block most of his attacks.
Keyword: most.

He pivots, calculates the angle wrong for once, and the end of his staff clips your side harder than intended.

You gasp, stumbling back.

The room goes silent except for the whir of the drones, which Donnie shuts down instantly with a sharp hand gesture.

He freezes.

For a second, his brain genuinely seems to crash.

"...Error. That was not in the simulation."

He drops his staff and rushes to you, hands hovering like he doesn't know how humans work.

"Pain level? Describe. Numeric scale preferred. Also, verbal description acceptable. Are you bleeding? Do you require immediate medical attention? I have a first-aid kit. I have six first-aid kits."

You wince, trying to brush it off.

He does not let you.

He gently places a hand near your side, not touching yet, waiting for permission, eyes flicking between you and the injury.

"I miscalculated. The force distribution was incorrect. This is on me."

He sounds calmer than he feels. You can tell because he starts talking faster.

He guides you to a chair, already grabbing a scanner from his belt and running it over you.

"No fractures. Bruising likely. Pain receptors activated. Fascinating and terrible."

He frowns at the scanner like it personally betrayed him.

"I should have accounted for human variability. I optimized for turtle physiology. That was... foolish."

He presses an ice pack against your side, his touch surprisingly gentle.

"I do not like variables that result in harm to allies."

You laugh softly, telling him you're fine.

He does not believe you.

"Humans often say 'I'm fine' when they are, in fact, not fine. You are banned from further sparring for 48 hours. This is non-negotiable."

He sits beside you, arms crossed, eyes fixed on you like he's guarding a critical system.

"Next time, we adjust the training algorithm. Slower speeds, softer impact materials, and additional safety protocols. Also... I will pay more attention."

He hesitates, then adds more quietly:

"You are not a test subject. You are important."

He clears his throat, pretending to inspect his scanner again.

"Therefore, harming you is... unacceptable."

He stays there, monitoring you like a human vitals machine, pretending he's just being scientific—but never once taking his eyes off you.

Chapter 3: TOO HARD —ft. Rise!Raphael

The training room echoes with the dull thud of your feet against the mat and the heavier, more controlled movements of Raphael.

"You're getting better," he says, crossing his arms, trying not to sound too proud. "Don't slack now."

You grin, lunging forward. Raph blocks easily, but this time he doesn't tease you. He's focused—too focused.

He throws a punch meant to stop just short of you.

It doesn't.

His knuckles clip your shoulder with more force than intended. The impact knocks you back a step, a sharp sting spreading through your arm.

You suck in a breath.

Raph's expression changes instantly.

"—Shoot. Shoot, shoot, shoot."

He drops his stance, eyes wide, hands lifting like he's scared to touch you.

"Hey, hey, I didn't mean to—are you okay? Say something."

You try to shrug it off, but he's already there, gently guiding you to sit down on the bench.

He kneels in front of you, huge hands surprisingly careful as he checks your shoulder.

"I told myself I'd go easy. I always go too hard. I should've pulled that punch more."

He looks genuinely angry—at himself.

He grabs an ice pack from the wall and presses it gently against your shoulder, his brow furrowed.

"Does it hurt when you move it? Like this? Don't lie."

You tell him it's fine. He does not accept that answer.

"You humans are terrible at admitting pain."

He keeps the ice there, one hand steady, the other resting on your arm like he's grounding himself.

"Training's done. For today. For the week if I say so."

You laugh, but he's serious.

"You're not a punching bag. You're my teammate. And I don't hurt my teammates."

He sits beside you, big frame tense, jaw clenched.

"Raph's supposed to protect people, not knock 'em around like some rookie. Splinter would chew me out for this."

He sighs, shoulders sagging, and gently bumps his shoulder against yours.

"Next time, we use pads. Or slow-mo drills. Or... you just tell me when to stop, okay? I don't wanna mess you up."

There's a pause.

Then, quieter:

"You matter. Got it?"

He stays there, ice pack in hand, refusing to leave until you're completely okay—acting like your personal bodyguard for the rest of the day.

Chapter 4: HEALING MODE ACTIVATED —ft. Rise!Michelangelo

The training room is loud with laughter—mostly Mikey's.

"Okay, okay, BUT WHAT IF we make this a dance battle and sparring at the same time?"

You try not to laugh as he spins his kusari-fundo like he's performing on a stage instead of training.

"Focus, Mikey!"

"I am focused! I'm just focused on ✨fun✨!"

You rush forward, dodging his swing, and he jumps back—too fast, too playful, not fully paying attention.

His chain snaps back at the wrong angle.

It catches your forearm with a sharp smack.

You hiss.

Mikey freezes mid-pose.

The room goes dead silent.

"...Oh."

He drops the weapon instantly, eyes wide, hands flying to his mouth.

"OH NO. OH NO. NO NO NO NO NO—"

He rushes over, sliding across the mat on his knees like a dramatic anime character.

"I DID NOT MEAN TO DO THAT. I SWEAR ON MY FAVORITE PIZZA TOPPING—WAIT, THAT'S TOO SERIOUS—ARE YOU OKAY?!"

He gently takes your arm, barely touching, like you're made of glass.

"Does it hurt? Did I break you? Humans are so fragile! I TOLD DONNIE WE NEEDED SOFTER CHAINS!"

You try to laugh it off, but your arm is definitely sore.

Mikey's face crumples.

"I'm the worst ninja. Worst friend. Worst turtle. Worst—"

He suddenly bolts up, sprinting to grab ice packs, a blanket, and a juice box for some reason.

He plops down next to you, wrapping the blanket around your shoulders like you're a burrito.

"Okay, healing mode activated. You are now under the protection of Doctor Mikey. Step one: ice. Step two: snacks. Step three: emotional support."

He presses the ice pack to your arm, his touch gentle, eyes fixed on you with genuine worry.

"I never wanna hurt you. You're supposed to have fun with us, not get bonked by my cool ninja tricks."

He sits closer, shoulder touching yours.

"Next time, we'll do training on pillows. Or bubble wrap. Or... just karaoke. Karaoke is safer."

You tell him you're okay.

He nods, but still looks guilty.

"Okay. But if you feel even a tiny bit ouchy, you tell me and I will personally fight the floor for being too hard."

He smiles softly, then offers you the juice box with a straw.

"For bravery."

Chapter 5: READER IS CHANGING CLOTHES (THEIR REACTION)

🐢💙 ***LEONARDO***

He'd freeze for half a second, brain completely buffering. Then he'd spin around so fast he almost faceplants.

"NOPE—SORRY—WRONG ROOM—PRETEND I WAS NEVER HERE—"

He'd be dramatically embarrassed but also weirdly theatrical about apologizing later, acting like it was a tragic anime moment.

🐢❤️ ***RAPHAEL***

Instant dad-mode big brother energy. He'd throw a towel/blanket/hoodie at you without looking.

"Yo! My bad! Didn't mean to—uh—yeah. I'll knock next time, promise."

He'd feel genuinely bad and probably stand guard outside so no one else barges in.

🐢💜 ***DONATELLO***

He'd mentally blue-screen, then immediately overthink the situation.

"Statistically speaking, the probability of me entering at the exact worst moment is—okay, I'm leaving now, bye."

He'd leave and then text you a very polite apology with bullet points about respecting privacy.

🐢🧡 ***MICHELANGELO***

He’d gasp dramatically and immediately cover his eyes with his hands—but peek through his fingers for half a second before realizing that’s rude.

“SORRY! I THOUGHT THIS WAS MY ROOM—WAIT, I DON’T HAVE A ROOM—OKAY BYE!”

He’d later offer you snacks as a peace offering because he feels bad.

Chapter 6: READER PECKED THEIR CHEEK (THEIR REACTION)

💙🐢 ***LEONARDO***

He would completely short-circuit. Like, literal buffering wheel behind his eyes. At first he'd pretend he's totally cool:

"Haha—yeah—what a totally normal, non-dramatic human gesture—"

But then his face would go bright red and he'd start pacing like he just got hit with emotional damage. Later, he'd replay it in his head like a dramatic anime flashback.

❤️🐢 ***RAPHAEL***

He'd freeze. Big tough guy suddenly turns into a shy turtle. He'd look away, scratching the back of his neck:

"Uh… yeah. That was… nice."

He wouldn't tease you, but he'd be secretly very happy and a bit protective afterward. Expect him to sit closer than usual.

💜🐢 ***DONATELLO***

He'd go completely still like a startled cat. Then overanalyze everything.

"Interesting. Unexpected physical affection. I will now need to recalibrate my emotional subroutines."

He'd act normal, but later he'd bring it up in the most awkward scientific way possible. Lowkey flustered, highkey thinking about it.

🧡🐢 ***MICHELANGELO***

He'd gasp dramatically, then beam like the sun.

“AW! THAT WAS SO SWEET! CAN I DO ONE BACK?”

He’d probably hug you, spin you around, or start giving everyone random cheek kisses out of happiness. Zero shame, maximum affection.

Chapter 7: Meeting Rise!Leonardo for the first time

(**Rise Leonardo – First Meeting**)

You're just trying to get home. *Key word: trying.*

The sky is purple, the street is on fire, and a giant floating Kraang monster is screaming in alien dubstep. You trip over a trash can, fully convinced this is how you die—eaten by a glowing cube jellyfish.

Then—

A blue blur drops from the sky. Two swords. A dramatic spin that absolutely did not need to be that dramatic.

"FEAR NOT, RANDOM CITIZEN! YOUR HERO HAS ARRIVED!"

He slices the Kraang tech in half, does a backflip for no reason, and lands in front of you like he's on a movie poster. The monster explodes. The street is quiet again.

You stare at him.

He stares at you.

He smiles, trying very hard to be cool.

"You're welcome."

You scream. Not a small scream. A horror-movie, banshee, soul-leaving-the-body scream.

Leo flinches so hard he almost drops his swords.

"WHOA—HEY—WAIT—NO—THIS IS THE PART WHERE YOU SAY 'THANK YOU' OR 'YOU'RE AMAZING' OR 'MARRY ME'—WHY ARE YOU SCREAMING—"

You back up. He steps forward. You back up more.

"Okay, okay, okay, I get it," he says, holding his hands up. "Masks are scary. Swords are scary. But I'm not scary. I'm very charming. Statistically."

You point at him.

"YOU'RE A TALKING TURTLE WITH SWORDS."

He blinks.

“…Rude.”

You sprint. He panics.

“WAIT! I JUST SAVED YOU! THIS IS A TERRIBLE FIRST IMPRESSION!”

He chases you—not ninja stealth chase, but awkward trying-not-to-look-like-a-kidnapper chase.

“PLEASE STOP RUNNING! I’M A GOOD GUY! I HAVE BROTHERS! I HAVE A SENSEI! I OWN A PLANT!”

You trip again (because of course you do), and he teleports in front of you with a blue portal and catches you bridal-style.

You scream louder.

“PUT ME DOWN, ANIME CHARACTER!”

He gently puts you down and sits on the ground so he looks less threatening.

“Okay. Reset. Hi. I’m Leonardo. Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle. Hero. Icon. Trendsetter. Not a demon.”

You stare at him. He smiles awkwardly.

“On a scale from ‘cool’ to ‘calling the police,’ where are we?”

You slowly lower your phone from dialing emergency services.

“…This is either a hallucination or I’m about to be on the news.”

“I mean, yes, but in a good way.”

There’s a beat. You poke his arm. It’s solid.

“…You’re real.”

“Unfortunately.”

You sigh, sit on the curb, and just accept your life is now a cartoon.

“So. Ninja turtle.”

“Teenage mutant ninja turtle,” he corrects. “The teenage part is important for branding.”

“…Can I go home now?”

“Yeah. But if anyone asks, you screamed because you were overwhelmed by my heroism.”

“I screamed because you’re a six-foot turtle.”

“Tomato, tomahto.”

Bonus: Leo telling the others later

Raph: “How’d first contact go?”

Leo: “She screamed.”

Donnie: “Statistically predictable.”

Mikey: “Did you offer pizza???”

Chapter 8: “Error 404: Brain Not Found” —ft. Rise!Donatello

(**Rise Donatello x Reader – Homework Edition**)

You’re slumped over the desk in Donnie’s lab, forehead basically glued to your notebook. There are equations. So many equations. They look like someone spilled alphabet soup on a calculator.

Donnie is standing next to you with a laser pointer and a whiteboard covered in diagrams, arrows, and at least three equations that definitely summon a demon.

“Okay,” he says, adjusting his goggles, “this is actually very simple. You just isolate the variable, apply the quadratic formula, and—are you listening?”

You blink at him.
“…Yes.”

You absolutely are not. He sighs, pinching the bridge of his nose.

“Humans. So inefficient.”

He points at the board.

“If x equals negative b plus or minus the square root of—”

Your head slowly tilts. Your eyes glaze over. You are actively buffering. Donnie stops mid-sentence.

“…You are blinking at a suspiciously low frequency.”

You try to focus, but your brain is already on airplane mode.

“So… x is… sad?”

He stares.
“What.”

You yawn so hard your soul leaves your body. Donnie drops the marker.

“Ah. Sleep deprivation. That explains the cognitive lag. When was the last time you slept?”

“Yesterday.”
“Yesterday when?”
“…Yesterday.”

He stares at you like he’s about to uninstall humanity. He crouches next to you and waves a hand in front of your face.

“Can you repeat anything I just said?”

You nod confidently.

“Quadratic… dragon.”

He slowly removes his goggles.

“I will never emotionally recover from this.”

You try to sit up straight, but instead you lean forward and gently bonk your forehead on the desk. Donnie gasps.

“NO. Do not power down. We are in the middle of knowledge transfer.”

He gently lifts your head and slides a pillow under it (he 100% had a lab pillow).

“Fine. Emergency protocol: tutoring suspension due to human sleep failure.”

He drapes a blanket over you like you’re a science experiment that needs warmth. You mumble something about numbers chasing you.

Donnie freezes.

“The numbers are not sentient. Yet.”

He hesitates, then quietly dims the lab lights. He sits beside you, still holding the marker like he’s going to continue teaching the air.

“For the record, you were doing reasonably well. For a human.”

You snore softly. He sighs and opens a laptop, typing:

“Subject: Student requires rest. Brain.exe stopped responding.”

He stares at you for a while.

“We will resume tomorrow. Preferably when your brain firmware has updated.”

He watches you for another second, then adds softly:

“Sleep is… important. For cognitive efficiency. And for you.”

Bonus: The next morning

You wake up with a blanket, a pillow, and your homework fully solved with neat notes. At the top, Donnie has written:

“Explanation simplified for human comprehension. You’re welcome.”

And a tiny doodle of a sleepy stick figure with “THIS IS YOU” written next to it.

Chapter 9: They ask you to be their Valentine | ALL OF THEM

💙 Leonardo:

Leo would want it to be dramatic and cinematic. He'd show up with a rose (he definitely stole it from a rooftop garden), wearing his cape like he's in a romance anime.

He'd strike a pose like he rehearsed this in the mirror for an hour.

"So. February 14th. A day of romance, destiny, and emotional vulnerability. And I, Leonardo—your favorite turtle—would like to formally request your presence as my Valentine."

Then he'd get nervous halfway through and ramble.

"Not that it's a big deal. Or that I'd be devastated if you said no. I mean I would be, but—uh—forget I said that—"

He'd hold out the rose like it's a sacred artifact, trying to look cool but clearly blushing.

❤️ Raphael

Raph would be simple, shy, and sincere. He wouldn't do a big speech. He'd just sit next to you with a small box of chocolates he pretends he didn't stress over.

"…Hey. So. Uh. There's this Valentine's thing tomorrow."

Long pause. He looks away.

"If you're not busy, I thought maybe we could hang out. Just us."

He'd slide the chocolates toward you like it's no big deal, but his ears (if turtles had ears) would be burning red.

💜 Donatello

Donnie would overengineer the confession. You'd walk into the lab and see a hologram pop up with graphs, charts, and a presentation titled:

"Proposal: Valentine Partnership Initiative"

He'd adjust his goggles and clear his throat.

"Statistically speaking, we have a high compatibility index. Therefore, I propose a joint participation in Valentine's Day activities. Opt-in is encouraged but not mandatory."

He'd hand you a heart-shaped device he built that lights up when you press a button.

“Pressing this indicates acceptance. Also, it plays music. And dispenses candy.”

He’s totally pretending it’s just science, but he’s very carefully not looking at you when you decide.

🧡 Michelangelo

Mikey would be LOUD, CHAOTIC, AND FULL OF LOVE.

He’d burst into your room with balloons, confetti, and a handmade card covered in glitter and stickers.

“HAPPY PRE-VALENTINE’S DAY! I MADE YOU A CARD AND COOKIES AND ALSO A SONG!”

He’d dramatically drop to one knee.

“WILL YOU BE MY VALENTINE AND ALSO MY BEST FRIEND AND ALSO MY DANCE PARTNER?”

Then he’d hug you before you can even answer and start planning your Valentine’s playlist.

Chapter 10: 🐢❤️ “Red Alert Protocol” | 2012 RAPH x Reader

(TMNT 2012 Raphael x Reader – Period Edition)

You wake up already knowing today is going to be terrible. Your stomach feels like someone is twisting a knife, your lower back is screaming, and your brain is running on pure irritation and spite.

You roll over and groan.

“I hate biology.”

From the other side of the lair, Raphael hears that sentence and immediately knows.

He freezes mid-push-up.

“…Oh no.”

———

🌋 Phase 1: The Warning Signs

You shuffle into the kitchen, wrapped in a hoodie three sizes too big, hair a mess, face tired, eyes full of violence.

Raph looks up from his cereal.

You glare at him.

He slowly lowers the spoon.

“Morning.”

You slam the fridge shut a little too hard.

“Why is the fridge so loud.”

He blinks.

“It’s… a fridge.”

“It’s judging me.”

He quietly puts his cereal away and steps aside.

Raph, the guy who regularly yells at mutants, robots, and his brothers, is now choosing peace.

Because he knows.

This is not the day to test you.

———

💢 Phase 2: Mood Swings (a.k.a. Emotional Whiplash)

You sit on the couch, curled up, hugging a pillow like it personally owes you money.

Raph approaches cautiously with a heating pad.

“Hey. Uh. I brought this.”

You snatch it.

“Why didn’t you bring it sooner.”

“I— I just woke up.”

“Unacceptable.”

He nods.

“Yeah. Totally. My bad.”

You plug it in and glare at the TV.

“Why is everything annoying.”

He sits beside you, hands on his knees like a soldier awaiting orders.

“Want chocolate?”

“Chocolate is a scam invented by corporations.”

“…I’ll just leave it here.”

———

🥊 Phase 3: Raph vs. Hormones (He Loses)

Donnie walks in.

“Statistically, you are exhibiting symptoms of menstrual discomfort—”

You throw a pillow at him.

“I WILL END YOU, PURPLE SCIENCE LIZARD.”

Donnie retreats instantly.

“Noted.”

Leo peeks around the corner.

“Is it safe?”

Raph crosses his arms.

“No.”

Mikey whispers:

“Should we bring pizza?”

Raph whispers back:

“Bring offerings.”

———

🛡️ Phase 4: Raph Becomes Your Guardian Angel (and Punching Bag)

You’re lying on the couch, heating pad on, chocolate beside you, glaring at existence.

Raph sits on the floor next to you, back against the couch, quietly scrolling on his phone for “how to help girlfriend cramps.”

He reads out loud.

“It says… ‘Be patient and supportive.’”

You groan.

“That article was written by someone who never met me.”

He carefully places a water bottle in your hand.

“Drink.”

“I don’t want to.”

“Drink or I’ll—”

He stops.

“…Please drink.”

You drink.

He sighs in relief like he just disarmed a bomb.

———

😡 Phase 5: You vs. Everyone

You suddenly sit up.

“Why does Leo breathe so loud.”

“He’s in the other room.”

“I CAN HEAR HIM.”

Raph nods.

“Yeah. I’ll tell him to… breathe quieter.”

He actually goes and tells Leo to keep it down.

Leo stares.

“What.”

“Just do it.”

———

🥺 Phase 6: The Soft Part (Raph Will Never Admit This)

A few hours later, you’re quieter.
Cramps still bad, mood still unstable, but now more tired than angry.

Raph brings you soup and sits beside you.

“Don’t gotta talk. Just… sit.”

You lean against him.

He stiffens for a second, then relaxes, carefully wrapping an arm around you.

“You’re not annoying, y’know.”

“I literally yelled at the fridge.”

“Yeah. But the fridge deserved it.”

You snort weakly.

He rubs your back in slow circles, clumsy but gentle.

“If I had to deal with that kinda pain every month, I’d probably punch a wall through time.”

“You already punch walls.”

“Yeah, but this’d be justified.”

You rest your head on his shoulder.

“You’re being… weirdly calm.”

He shrugs.

“Someone’s gotta be the chill one.”

“You are the least chill person I know.”

“Yeah, but you’re scarier right now.”

You laugh softly, then wince.

He adjusts the heating pad and hands you another pillow.

“Sleep. I’ll be here.”

———

🌙 Phase 7: Night Watch

Later, you wake up half-asleep to find Raph still sitting there, playing a game with one hand and holding your hand with the other.

He notices you’re awake.

“Hey.”

“You could’ve gone to bed.”

“Nah. You’re gonna need more water later.”

You squeeze his hand weakly.

“…Thanks.”

He pretends not to care, but his grip tightens slightly.

“Yeah. Just don’t tell the guys I’m soft. I got a reputation.”

———

😂 Bonus: Next Morning

You wake up feeling slightly better.

Raph hands you coffee and a chocolate bar.

“For surviving biology.”

You smile.

“You’re my emotional support turtle.”

“Don’t push it.”

But he sits next to you anyway.

Chapter 11: 🐢💙 “Tiny Human, Massive Crisis” (Rise Leonardo x Reader – Baby Fever Edition)

You’re just trying to have a normal day. Keyword: trying.

Leo insisted on going above ground “to observe human culture,” which is his fancy way of saying he wanted snacks and drama. So now you’re walking through a busy park while he’s wearing a hoodie and sunglasses that absolutely do not hide the fact that he’s a six-foot-tall ninja turtle.

“Okay,” he says, pointing at a hot dog stand. “Question. Why do humans eat mystery meat on a stick willingly?”

“It’s not mystery meat.”

“That’s exactly what mystery meat would say.”

You roll your eyes and keep walking.

That’s when you see it.

A stroller.

A tiny baby bundled in pastel blankets, gripping a plush toy and making little squeaky noises like a malfunctioning kitten. You barely register it. Leonardo stops dead. You notice he’s not walking anymore.

You turn around. He is staring at the baby. Not cool-guy staring. Not hero-staring.

More like existential crisis staring.

“…Leo?”

He doesn’t respond. He slowly crouches down to eye level with the stroller, hands on his knees like he’s about to negotiate with a tiny diplomat.

The baby blinks at him. Leo blinks back.

“…It’s so small.”

You step closer.
“Yeah. That’s how babies work.”

The baby giggles. Leo gasps. Like someone just performed a miracle.

“IT MADE A SOUND.”

“Yes, Leo. Babies are known for sounds.”

He gently waves a hand. The baby grabs his finger with shocking strength.

Leo freezes again.

“…It has attached to me.”

The baby’s mom smiles awkwardly.
“She likes you.”

Leo looks like he just received a sacred quest.
“She… likes me.”

He turns to you, eyes wide.
“She trusts me. A baby. A literal human larva has chosen me.”

“Please never call babies larva again.”

He crouches lower, whispering to the baby like it’s a secret agent.

“Hello. I am Leonardo. Hero. Icon. Emotional mess.”

The baby coos. Leo’s hand trembles.

“Why is it so warm. Why is it so squishy. Why does it smell like milk and destiny.”

You tug his sleeve.

“Leo, you’re gonna scare the poor woman.”

He stands up but keeps looking back at the stroller like someone leaving a puppy store.

“…What if I dropped it.”

“You didn’t even hold it.”

“BUT WHAT IF.”

You walk away, but he keeps turning around, dramatically looking back.

“I cannot believe humans just… have these.”

“Have what.”

“TINY PEOPLE.”

—

He suddenly stops again.
“Hypothetical.”

“No.”

“Hypothetical,” he insists, holding up a finger, “what if I had a tiny human.”

“Leo—”

“Would it wear a little mask. Like a mini mask. With tiny swords. Or maybe tiny portals. Could it portal. Babies probably can portal.”

“Babies cannot portal.”

“Not with that attitude.”

He crosses his arms, thinking deeply.
“Would I be a good dad.”

You choke on your drink.
“YOU ARE NOT EVEN GOOD AT DOING LAUNDRY.”

“That was ONE TIME.”

“You turned all your clothes blue.”

“I LIKE BLUE.”

He plops down on a bench next to you, staring into the distance like a soap opera protagonist.

“What if I fail it.”

“It’s a baby, not a math test.”

“What if it hates me.”

“Babies don’t even know what taxes are, I think you’re fine.”

He sighs dramatically.

“But what if it looks up to me. I can barely look up to me.”

You pat his shoulder.
“Leo. You’re spiraling because you saw a stroller.”

“IT WAS A VERY EMOTIONAL STROLLER.”

You sit beside him.
“You’d be fine, you know.”

He glances at you.
“Yeah?”

“Yeah. You’re dramatic, reckless, and chaotic, but you care a lot. That’s literally half of parenting.”

He hums thoughtfully.
“I would teach it parkour.”

“Please don’t.”

“I would teach it dramatic entrances.”

“Please definitely don’t.”

He smiles, but it’s softer now.
“…It was cute, though.”

“Yeah.”

“Tiny human. Tiny socks. Tiny destiny.”

You laugh.

———

For the next week:
• He sends you videos of baby turtles like: “LOOK. TINY.”
• He asks Donnie if baby turtles need college funds.
• He tells Mikey he wants to be the “cool uncle of the team.”
• He Googles “can mutant turtles legally adopt” (Donnie confiscates his tablet).

And every time he sees a stroller? He whispers:

“Tiny human…”

Like he just witnessed a rare Pokémon.

Chapter 12: Size Difference —ft. Bayverse Leonardo

Chapter Summary

[CONTAINS NSFW, read under your own responsibility.]

“Agh— fuck, wait—“

As soon as those words leave your mouth, he stills. He cups your face with both hands and looks into your eyes.

“Did I hurt you? Want me to pull out? Should we try another way?”

You look up at him, then down between your legs where his cock rests inside of you. You both knew the problem with having sex with a mutant turtle: the size difference. You didn’t know it would hurt that much, so you dismissed it and convinced him to have sex.

Now, after two sad thrusts, you couldn’t help but feel the pain and the fire in your vagina due to his thick member.

“No, no— I mean, it’s not your fault. I just need to adapt.” you mumble, caressing his hands on your cheeks.

A low rumble vibrates in his chest, his blue eyes softening. He adjusts his grip on your hips, pulling you just a fraction deeper inside, pausing to let your muscles stretch around him.

"Tell me when," he murmurs, breath warm against your forehead. "We go slow. Just tell me when it’s too much."

He shifts, pressing his forehead to yours as he remains perfectly still, letting you feel every inch of him inside you, waiting for your signal to move. You nod slowly and close your eyes, sighing softly and patting his shoulder as a signal for him to continue.

“Okay, okay.”

He withdraws almost entirely, leaving only the thick head still nestled inside you before pushing back in, a slow, deliberate glide that makes you gasp.

"Better?" he asks, his voice rough, holding your hips steady as he repeats the motion, each thrust a fraction deeper than the last. The stretch burns, but underneath it, a strange, full bloom starts to unfurl in your belly. He leans down, his mouth finding the sensitive spot just below your ear, and you arch into him, your nails digging into his skin.

“Kinda.” you moan seeking for his mouth, wrapping your arms around his neck and kissing him softly.

He meets your lips halfway, a soft sigh humming against your mouth as he kisses you back, slow and deep. The tension in his shoulders eases, and his thrusts grow a little more confident, a little deeper.

He keeps them slow though, mindful of you, each roll of his hips a deliberate pressure that sparks a slow burn somewhere deep inside you.

"You feel... incredible," he murmurs against your lips, his voice a low thrum. "So tight around me."

You let out a louder moan, which is shut down by his mouth. His tongue slides against yours, swallowing the sound. Every movement is deliberate, a slow, deep drag that makes the burn inside you twist into something else entirely. He breaks the kiss, only to press his lips to your jaw, your neck, whispering,

"That's it. Just like that," his voice rough as he rolls his hips again, pushing you closer to the edge with every slow, controlled stroke.

“Leo~…” you roll your head backwards.

A guttural sound vibrates deep in his chest as your breathy plea hits his ears. He nips gently at the delicate skin of your throat, his pace still slow but relentless, each movement designed to stretch you, fill you, claim you completely.

"Yeah?" he growls, his voice a low rumble against your skin. "Tell me more."

He shifts his angle slightly, letting the thick head of him press against a deep, sensitive spot inside you, making your entire body clench around him.

A sudden lower back pain makes you flinch and place your hands in his shoulders.

He stops dead, his breath catching.

"Hey, hey, easy," he murmurs, his large hands immediately soothing over your hips, his touch gentle now. He holds himself perfectly still, giving you a moment.

“Too much?" He leans down, his blue eyes searching yours, full of concern. "We can just... stay like this for a minute, if you need."

You nod quickly, caressing his shoulders. “Yes please, gimme a min—“

He doesn't move a muscle, just lets your fingers trace the hard lines of his shoulders. The low thrum of his engine vibrates through you, a steady, grounding hum against your skin. His eyes never leave yours, watching you, waiting for you to give the signal. He doesn't rush, doesn't press. Just holds you there, inside him, a solid, living presence.

You look up at him apologetically. “I’m sorry…you are supposed to enjoy having sex with your girlfriend…and here I am..”

A low, amused rumble vibrates through his chest, a sound more of metal than man.

"Hey," he says, his voice a soft growl. His thumb strokes a slow circle on your hip. "None of that. This isn't about me, it's about us. And you're not a problem. You're the whole damn point." He leans down, resting his forehead against yours. "Just breathe with me, okay?"

You close your eyes and hug him tighter. “I’m sorry Leo”

He sighs, a deep, rumbling sound that vibrates through you both, pulling you even closer against his massive chest.

"Hey," he murmurs again, his voice low and rough. "Stop saying that. There's nothing to be sorry for, okay?"

He tightens his arms around you, holding you gently but firmly, a solid, comforting wall. "Let's just... take a breath."

You nod and bury your face in the crook of his neck. He holds you, his big body a solid, comforting shield. After a long moment, he speaks, his voice a low rumble against your ear.

"Feeling any better now?" One of his hands slides slowly up and down your spine, a calming, rhythmic motion. He's not pushing, just waiting, giving you all the time you need.

You nod slowly but before you could say anything, he’s already pulling out of you very gently and very careful.

“H-Hey, what are you doing..?”

He pauses, the broad head of him just inside you.

"I'm giving you space," he murmurs, his voice a low, concerned rumble. "Just for a bit. If you need a break, we can stop."

His blue eyes search yours, filled with an almost painful tenderness. "I don't want to hurt you."

You look up into his eyes and found nothing but comprehension.

“But…”

He doesn't pull away. Instead, he shifts, just enough to let you breathe but keep you connected. His large hand comes up to cup your jaw, his calloused thumb stroking your cheekbone.

"No 'but's," he says, his voice a soft growl. "We've got all the time in the world. Just tell me what you need."

You keep looking into his eyes, then you close them and smile softly, rubbing your nose against his snout.

“Can we just lay and cuddle? I want to be in your arms.” you whisper.

A slow, rumbling purr vibrates through his chest and into you.

"Absolutely," he whispers, his voice thick with emotion. He carefully withdraws the last of the way, his movements deliberate and slow as he shifts to lie on his back, gently pulling you to rest your head on his massive chest.

His arms wrap around you, a warm, solid embrace. "Just like this," he murmurs, his hand settling on your back. "I've got you."

You rest your head on his chest and run your hands across his plastron.

“I love you so much, thank you for not rushing anything.”

He nuzzles the top of your head, a soft, almost tender sound.

"I could never rush you," he says, his voice a low rumble that resonates in his chest beneath your cheek. "You're everything."

His hand rests on your back, a warm, grounding pressure. "And I love you more than words can say."

Chapter 13: Big Hands, Soft Heart —ft. Bayverse Raphael

Chapter Summary

> You and Raph make three months together and he plans a surprise for you. [cute, fluffy Raphael]

Raphael was not good at this kind of thing. Punching through steel doors? Easy. Throwing Foot Clan soldiers across rooftops? No problem. Intimidating grown men with one glare? Natural talent. But planning a romantic surprise for his girlfriend?

That was torture.

He stood in the lair's garage area with his arms crossed so tight over his plastron it looked like he was trying to crush himself. The Turtle Tank loomed behind him, freshly cleaned—well, cleaner than usual. One of the side seats had an actual blanket folded on it instead of discarded weapons or Mikey's snack wrappers.

And somehow, that made him more nervous than fighting Shredder ever had.

"Ya keep pacing grooves into the floor," Donatello said from where he leaned over a tablet. "At this rate, structural repairs will be necessary."

"I ain't pacing."

"You have crossed the room seventeen times."

"I'm thinkin'."

"That's pacing with extra denial."

Raphael shot him a glare sharp enough to cut metal. Donnie barely looked up. Across the room, Michelangelo was hanging upside down from a pipe, munching cereal straight from the box.

"Bro's got butterflies," Mikey sang.

"I got fists with your name on 'em."

"Awww, he's blushing too."

"I CAN'T blush!"

“You absolutely can,” Leonardo said, entering with maddening calmness. “You turn a slightly darker shade of green.”

Raphael growled low in his throat. This was why he should’ve kept his mouth shut. All he had done was mention—once—that today marked three months since you’d agreed to be his girl. Three months of somehow liking him back. Three months of not being scared off by his temper, his size, or the fact that he lived underground with three mutant brothers and a rat father.

Three months of smiling at him like he was something worth choosing. And now everyone was involved.

“Relax,” Leo said, stepping beside him. “You planned something thoughtful. She’ll love it.”

Raphael grunted. He hated when Leo was right.

It had started two weeks ago when he’d found a hidden lake on patrol—tucked away beyond the city limits, surrounded by trees and silence. No sirens. No crowds. No concrete. Peaceful. He’d immediately thought of you.

Then Donnie had helped scout the safest route. Mikey insisted on adding snacks. Leo had suggested flowers and got told to shut up. Raphael himself had spent an embarrassing amount of time trying to choose food you’d like. He’d even gone back to the same deli twice because the first sandwiches “didn’t look right.”

No one was ever hearing about that.

“You packed the basket?” Leo asked.

“Yeah.”

“Blanket?”

“Yeah.”

“Drinks?”

“Yeah.”

“Bug spray?”

Raphael froze. Donnie slowly raised a hand. “Already included.”

Raphael muttered, “Thanks.”

Mikey gasped dramatically. “Did Raph just express gratitude?”

“I take it back.”

—

You were supposed to arrive in ten minutes. Raphael had changed his bandana twice. No one knew that. He also kept checking the mirror on the Tank's side panel, then pretending he wasn't. No one knew that either.

When footsteps echoed from the tunnel entrance and your voice floated into the garage, every muscle in his body locked up.

"Hello? Anyone alive down here?"

Mikey cackled. "He's gonna faint."

Raphael shoved him off the pipe. Then he straightened, rolled his shoulders, and tried to look like he absolutely did not care that you were here. You stepped into view, and his heart did that stupid thing again. You smiled the second you saw him. There it was—that warm, easy smile reserved differently for him than anyone else. Softer. Closer.

"Hey," you said.

"Hey."

Brilliant conversation. Amazing start.

You glanced around the garage suspiciously. "Why does everyone look like they know something?"

"We don't know anything," Mikey said instantly.

Donnie snorted. Leo pinched the bridge of his nose. You narrowed your eyes, then looked back at Raphael.

"…Raph."

"Nothin'."

"That face means something."

"What face?"

"That face where you pretend you're not hiding something."

"I ain't hidin' nothin'."

"You are literally standing in front of the Tank like a bodyguard."

He moved aside half an inch, then back again. You laughed softly, and it hit him right in the chest.

"C'mere," he muttered.

You walked over without hesitation, stopping close enough that your hand brushed his wrist. That simple touch grounded him instantly. He cleared his throat.

“I got somethin’ planned.”

Your eyes widened. “For me?”

“For us” he corrected gruffly.

The way your expression softened nearly killed him. “Raph…”

“Don’t make it weird.”

“I wasn’t!”

“You were about to.”

You grinned. “Maybe.”

He pulled a folded strip of dark cloth from behind his shell. Your eyebrows shot up. “Oh? Kinky.”

Behind you, Mikey wheezed so hard he fell again. Raphael nearly combusted.

“IT’S FOR A SURPRISE.”

“I’m teasing.”

“Yeah, well—stop it.”

You laughed harder, then leaned up to kiss the side of his jaw. His anger vanished immediately, because of course it did.

“Okay,” you said sweetly. “Blindfold me.”

He tied the cloth carefully over your eyes, far gentler than hands that could bend steel had any right to be.

“Too tight?” he asked quietly.

“No.”

“Can you breathe?”

“Yes.”

“See anything?”

“Only your paranoia.”

Mikey was making kissy noises in the background. Raphael snarled over his shoulder, “One more sound and I’m launchin’ you through a wall.”

Then he took your hand. Even through all his nerves, all the planning, all the fear of messing it up… the second your fingers curled trustingly around his, everything steadied.

“Step up,” he said, guiding you carefully.

“Where are we going?”

“You’ll see.”

“You know I hate surprises.”

“You’ll survive.”

“You better not be kidnapping me.”

“No promises.”

You laughed as he helped you climb into the Turtle Tank, still blindfolded, trusting him completely. And for the first time all morning, Raphael smiled without trying to hide it.

—

The Turtle Tank rumbled through the tunnel system like an angry beast, every turn vibrating through the metal frame.

Raphael gripped the wheel tighter than necessary. Beside him, you sat in the passenger seat with the cloth still tied over your eyes, hands folded in your lap like you were the calmest person in the world.

Meanwhile, he was internally losing his mind. He’d fought ninjas with less stress than this.

“You comfortable?” he asked gruffly, eyes fixed on the road ahead.

“Yes.”

“Seatbelt on?”

“Yes.”

“You cold?”

“No.”

“…You sure?”

You smiled beneath the blindfold. “Raph.”

“What?”

“You asked me that three times.”

“I’m checkin’.”

“You’re panicking.”

“I am not panicking.”

“You sound like you’re interrogating me.”

He scoffed. “Please. If I was interrogatin’ you, you’d know.”

You laughed softly, and the sound loosened something in his chest. The Tank burst from the tunnel exit and onto the dark road above, city lights fading behind them as Raphael drove farther out than most people ever did at this hour.

For a few minutes, only the engine filled the silence. Raphael hated silence when he was nervous.

“So…” he started.

“So?” you echoed.

“So… uh…”

He had no follow-up. You bit back a grin. “Strong opening.”

“Shut up.”

“No, no, continue. I’m fascinated.”

He shot you a side glance even though you couldn’t see it. “I’m drivin’. Be respectful.”

“You’re adorable when you’re flustered.”

“I ain’t flustered.”

“You changed your bandana twice today.”

His head snapped toward you. “How do you know that?”

“I saw Donnie carrying the first one to the laundry.”

Traitor.

You laughed harder when he growled under his breath.

“Relax,” you said more gently after a moment. “You’re acting like this has to be perfect.”

He didn’t answer. Because yeah. That was exactly what he was acting like.

You tilted your head toward him, though blindfolded. “Raphael.”

“What?”

“If you planned it… I’m already sure I’m going to love it.”

His fingers tightened on the steering wheel. That simple sentence hit harder than any punch ever had.

“You don’t even know what it is,” he muttered.

“Doesn’t matter.”

“Could be terrible.”

“It won’t be.”

“You dunno that.”

“I do.”

“How?”

“Because it came from you.”

Silence again. This time, not awkward. Heavy. Warm. Raphael swallowed and looked back to the road before you could somehow sense how much that got to him.

“You always this cheesy?” he muttered.

“Only for you.”

“Dangerous habit.”

“Worth it.”

He snorted despite himself.

The city gave way to quieter roads, then narrower ones. Trees lined both sides, their shadows stretching across the pavement in the moonlight. No traffic. No sirens. No neon signs. Just night air and distance. You noticed the smoother ride and frowned.

“We’re not in the city anymore.”

“Nope.”

“Should I be worried?”

“Probably.”

“Raphael.”

“Kiddin’…Mostly.”

“Raph!”

He barked out a laugh, real and rough, and your hand immediately searched for his across the console. Without thinking, he moved one hand from the wheel long enough to clasp yours. His palm was huge around your fingers. You squeezed once. He squeezed back. Then, because he was Raphael, he let go first and pretended it hadn’t happened.

When they finally reached the clearing, Raphael slowed the Tank to a stop. The lake beyond shimmered silver under the moonlight. Trees surrounded it like a wall of shadows, branches swaying softly in the breeze. The water was still except for tiny ripples near the shore. Peaceful. Hidden.

Perfect.

He stared at it for one second, then immediately found ten things wrong. Maybe the blanket should’ve gone closer. Maybe the tree was too far from the water. Maybe the basket—

“Why’d we stop?” you asked.

“Nothin’. Stay there.”

“That sounds suspicious.”

“It’s instructions.”

He hopped out before you could argue, grabbed the picnic basket from the back, then hurried to the spot he’d chosen earlier. Blanket spread. Corners flattened. Basket set down. Drinks upright. Flowers adjusted.

He stepped back, frowned, moved the basket two inches left, then nodded once. Good enough.

Then he jogged back to the Tank. Opening your door, he found you smiling like you’d been entertained the whole time.

“You done fussing?” you asked.

“I wasn’t fussing.”

“You were gone long enough to redecorate.”

“C’mon.”

He carefully took your hand again and guided you down from the passenger seat. One arm stayed around your waist as you stepped to the ground.

“Watch your footing.”

“I’m blindfolded, remember?”

“Yeah, well, don’t die.”

“How romantic.”

“Shut it.”

He led you slowly across the grass, one massive hand steady at your back. The closer you got, the more he could hear your breathing change—curious, excited. He stopped once you were standing on the blanket beneath the tree. The lake stretched only a few feet ahead.

Raphael suddenly forgot how to speak. You turned your face toward him beneath the cloth.

“…Raph?”

He cleared his throat. “Okay. Uh.”

Poetry. He reached up carefully, fingers brushing your hair as he untied the knot. Then he slid the cloth away from your eyes. You blinked once. Twice. And then looked out at the moonlit lake in complete amazement.

Raphael stood completely still. Which, for Raphael, was the clearest sign of panic possible.

He watched your face as your eyes traced the lake, the silver moonlight over the water, the trees surrounding the clearing, the blanket laid beneath the branches, the basket beside it.

You didn’t speak right away. That was bad. Maybe you hated lakes. Maybe the blanket looked stupid. Maybe the sandwiches got soggy. Maybe—

You turned so fast he barely had time to brace himself before you launched at him.

“RAPH!”

Your arms wrapped around his neck and you kissed him hard on the cheek. Then the other cheek. Then his jaw. Then the bridge of his nose. Then somewhere near his temple because you were moving too fast to aim properly.

He staggered back half a step. “Whoa—hey—”

“This is amazing!” Another kiss. “How did you even find this place?!” Another kiss. “This is the sweetest thing anyone has ever done for me!” Another kiss.

“Stop movin’!” he barked, though his voice cracked halfway through it.

“I’m not moving, you’re moving!”

“You’re attacking me!”

“With love!”

“That still counts!”

You laughed against his face and kissed the corner of his mouth this time. That one shut him up instantly. His cheeks darkened under the green. You pulled back just enough to grin at him.

“There’s the blush.”

“I hate you.”

“No, you don’t.”

“…Yeah.”

His hands found your waist automatically, steadying you against him. Then he muttered, quieter, “You really like it?”

Your expression softened immediately. “Raph.” You cupped his face in both hands, thumbs brushing under his eyes. “I love it.”

Every bit of tension he’d been carrying all day seemed to drop off him at once. He exhaled through his nose, long and rough.

“Good,” he said, pretending he hadn’t nearly passed out from stress. “Woulda been awkward otherwise.”

You laughed softly and kissed him properly this time—slow, warm, lingering.
When you pulled away, he chased after it for half a second before catching himself. You absolutely noticed. You absolutely looked smug about it.

“C’mon,” he grumbled. “Before the food gets cold.”

You both settled on the blanket beneath the tree, the lake glimmering in front of you. The night air was cool enough that you tucked yourself against his side almost immediately. Raphael tried to act like it was no big deal while discreetly wrapping one arm around your shoulders and pulling you closer.

“Warm enough?” he asked.

“Yes.”

“You sure?”

“Yes.”

“You cold, tell me.”

You looked up at him with a grin.

“You’ve become weirdly attentive.”

“Say one more word and I’m throwin’ you in the lake.”

“Romantic.”

“Eat your sandwich.”

You took one bite and made an exaggerated sound of delight. “Oh my god.”

“What?”

“This is from that deli I like.”

He froze. “…Maybe.”

“You went all the way there?”

“No.”

“Raph.”

“…Twice.”

Your jaw dropped. “You went twice?!”

“The first ones looked bad, alright? Don’t make a thing outta it.”

You were already making a thing out of it. You put the sandwich down and grabbed his face again.

“No—hey—”

Too late. You kissed him all over again until he was grumbling and flustered and trying not to smile.

“Crazy woman,” he muttered when you finally released him.

“You adore me.”

“Unfortunately.”

You resumed eating while leaning into him, and for a while there was only the sound of water moving softly against the shore. No city noise. No missions. No brothers yelling. No pressure.

Just you and him.

Raphael wasn’t used to peace. But with you, it never felt unnatural. At one point you rested your head on his shoulder and traced lazy circles on the inside of his wrist. He looked down at you. Your hair moved gently in the breeze. Your eyes were half-lidded, content, focused on the lake. And something inside him went painfully soft.

“You know,” you murmured, “I can’t believe you did all this.”

He shrugged with one shoulder. “Ain’t that much.”

“You planned it. Packed everything. Found this place. Cleaned the Tank, probably.”

He said nothing. Your head lifted.

“You cleaned the Tank?”

“No.”

“Raphael.”

“…Maybe.”

You burst out laughing.

“Stop laughin’.”

“You cleaned the Tank for me?”

“It was disgusting.”

“It always is.”

“Exactly.”

You laughed harder, then scooted closer until you were practically in his lap. He let you. Obviously. You rested both hands on his plastron and looked at him in that dangerous way you had—the one that made him want to hand over everything.

“Thank you,” you said quietly.

He scratched the back of his head, suddenly awkward again. “Yeah, well.”

“No, really. Thank you.”

He looked away toward the water. Then back at you. Then sighed like the words physically hurt.

“You’re worth it, aight?”

You blinked.

“All the planning stuff. The nervous crap. Sweatin’ like an idiot all day. Every stupid second of it.” His voice lowered. “You’re worth every drop.”

Your eyes softened instantly. “Raph…”

He swallowed once, then forced himself to keep going. “You’re the love of my life.”

The words hung in the night air. Raw. Honest. Terrifying. He immediately frowned like he regretted being vulnerable.

“Don’t make it weird.”

But you were already kissing him again, slow and sweet and smiling against his mouth. When you pulled back, forehead resting against his, you whispered:

“You’re the love of mine too.”

Chapter 14: “Instinct Season” — Rise!Mikey x Reader

Chapter Summary

(Totally SFW • comfort • cuddles • needy Mikey)

It started the way it always did. A shift in temperature. A shift in mood. A shift in the way Mikey followed you around the lair like a gentle, warm little sun.

You were in the middle of helping Donnie test some gadget when you felt someone staring at you very intensely. Turning, you saw Mikey leaning on the doorframe, eyes half-lidded, expression soft as melted marshmallow.

“Angel,” he murmured, voice sweet and small.

Your heart skipped. Yep. The season had started.

———

His brothers hid it — Mikey never did. Leo pretended nothing happened. Raph disappeared to the gym for hours. Donnie locked himself in his lab with twelve fans blasting.

But Mikey?

He became a koala with emotions. A warm, clingy, love-drunk little turtle determined to fuse with your side. He didn’t even try to hide it. Not from you. Especially not from you.

———

You walked over, already smiling.
“What’s up, sweets?”

Mikey blinked slowly, cheeks puffing out as he took a long, deep breath like he was trying to inhale your entire existence. Then he wrapped both arms around you and just… melted. Not a hug. A full-body collapse.

“Can we go to my room?” he mumbled into your shoulder. “It’s starting.”

You brushed his head gently. “Yeah, baby. Of course.”

He let out the softest relieved sound — something between a hum and a purr — and kept his arms locked around you as you both walked, like he physically refused to let go.

Leo passed by, took one look, and whispered dramatically:
“Ah. The season of chaos returns.”

Mikey stuck his tongue out at him without lifting his head from your shoulder.

———

The moment you stepped into his room, the heat hit you.

His body temperature always went up during this time — not painfully hot, just… warm. Like a plushie straight out of the dryer. You placed a hand on his cheek.

“Mikey… you’re burning up.”

He shook his head immediately, eyes bright and earnest. “I’m okay. I promise. Just— I need you. Need to be close. ‘S instincts.”

You smiled gently. “I’m not going anywhere.”

He lit up. Then he dropped to the floor and—
Oh.
Of course.
The nest.

Every year he built one. And every year it was bigger. This time he’d dragged in:
• pillows from every room
• blankets stacked like a five-star fort
• weighted throws
• plushies
• even his comfort hoodie that smelled like you

Mikey crawled into the middle of it, patting the spot right beside him with frantic little taps.

“Angel— c’mere. Now. Please.”

You barely sat down before he grabbed your wrist, pulled you into the soft mountain of blankets, and curled around you like he was afraid gravity might steal you. Arms locked around your torso. Face buried in your collarbone. Leg hooked over yours. The whole koala package.

He let out a trembling exhale, nuzzling deeper.

“Perfect…” he whispered. “This is perfect…”

———

Minutes passed. Or maybe hours. Hard to tell with how clingy he was. Every time you shifted even a millimeter, his arms tightened.

“Don’t go.”

“I’m here, baby.”

“Mmm… good…”

Sometimes he just nuzzled your neck with this quiet desperation, like your smell alone grounded him. Sometimes he kissed your cheek, lazy and soft, like he couldn’t help himself. And sometimes, he pressed his forehead to yours, eyes half-closed, breathing you in.

He was so warm you could practically feel the heat radiating off of him.

“Mikey…” you whispered, stroking his shell. “You sure you’re okay?”

He nodded, rubbing his cheek against yours.

“Yeah. Promise. Just… feel everything stronger. Need touch. Need you. Instincts get loud.” Then softer: “You make it go quiet.”

Your heart clenched. You kissed his head, and Mikey melted like you’d just unplugged his bones.

———

At some point, he grew drowsy. But he refused— refused —to let go. He clung to you like a baby koala hugging a eucalyptus tree, muttering small, sleepy things:

“Love you…”
“You smell like home…”
“Stay forever…”
“Mine… mmm no— not like that— but like… you’re my person…”
“I’m so lucky…”

Your chest ached with affection. He shifted again, pulling you impossibly closer, his shell flush against your stomach as he tucked himself under your chin. Completely vulnerable. Completely trusting.

“Y/N…?”

“Yeah, honey?”

“…thank you for not making me hide it.”

You kissed the top of his head.
“You never have to hide anything from me.”

A tiny smile curved against your throat. Then he wrapped both arms even tighter, whispering:

“Good… ‘cause I need you so much right now.”

“I know, baby.”

“And you’re staying?”

“I’m staying.”

He hummed, and his voice went soft, syrupy, content:

“Then I can sleep…”

And finally — held safely in your arms, surrounded by the nest he built for both of you — he drifted off. You stroked his head as he breathed gently against your neck.

Warm. Peaceful. Completely wrapped around you like you were the only anchor he had. And honestly?

You wouldn’t have it any other way.

Chapter 15: Mama’s boy —ft. Bayverse Leonardo

Chapter Summary

> You are some kind of mother figure for the turtles, since you raised them together with Splinter.
>
> Now, years later, Leonardo became such a mama’s boy.

Before there were missions, before there was leadership, before the weight of responsibility ever settled on his shoulders—you were there.

You met Splinter when everything had just fallen apart. When he was still adjusting to what he had become, still grieving, still trying to figure out how to move forward. You didn’t leave. You stayed, helped him rebuild, helped him heal.

And when four little turtles came into your life, you raised them together—not just as warriors, but as a family.

To all of them, you’re their mother.

But to Leonardo… it’s something deeper.

Leo grew up trying to be perfect. The responsible one. The leader. The one who doesn’t break, doesn’t hesitate, doesn’t fail. Raphael challenges him, Donatello questions him, Michelangelo looks up to him—but none of them see what’s underneath.

You do.

Because with you, he doesn’t have to be “the leader.”

With you, he’s just your son.

There are things he tells you that no one else ever hears. Doubts he buries before they can reach the surface. Fears he’d never admit—not to his brothers, not even to Splinter. The pressure, the second-guessing, the quiet fear of making the wrong call and getting someone hurt.

He carries it all.

But not alone.

Tonight, the lair is quiet. Too quiet. The others are off doing their own things, and Splinter is meditating. You’re settling in after a long day when you feel it—that familiar presence

lingering nearby.

Leo.

He doesn't announce himself. He never does with you.

He just… appears.

Leaning slightly against the doorway, arms crossed at first, trying to look composed. But you notice it immediately—the tension in his posture, the way his gaze flickers, like something's weighing on him.

You don't even have to ask.

"…Ma."

It's quiet. Softer than anyone else ever gets from him.

You look up, and that's all it takes.

He exhales, shoulders dropping just a fraction, like the simple act of being near you already makes it easier to breathe. After a moment, he steps inside, hesitating only briefly before sitting beside you—closer than he would with anyone else.

"I—" he starts, then stops, rubbing the back of his neck. "Can I just… stay here a bit?"

He doesn't wait for an answer, not really. He already knows it's yes.

There's a pause. A long one. And then, slowly, the walls start to come down.

"I think I messed up today," he admits quietly, eyes fixed anywhere but yours. "I made the call, and it just… didn't feel right. But I couldn't hesitate, and now I keep thinking—what if there was a better way? What if I just didn't see it?"

His voice lowers, almost to a whisper.

"What if I'm not as ready as I'm supposed to be?"

That's the side of him no one else sees.

Not the leader. Not the fighter.

Just Leo… your boy, sitting a little too close, voice a little too small, trusting you with the parts of himself he hides from the rest of the world.

It wasn't a dramatic rooftop battle aftermath. It wasn't during some near-death confession. It was quiet. Almost awkwardly normal. Just you and Leo sitting side by side on one of the higher rooftops, legs dangling over the edge, city lights glowing beneath you.

You'd been dating for a little while now — stolen glances, inside jokes, hands brushing for a second too long. But neither of you had crossed that line yet. And the tension? It had been

building.

Leo was unusually quiet. No smug one-liners. No exaggerated poses. He kept tapping his fingers against his knee like he was mentally rehearsing something. “So,” he started, voice a little less smooth than usual, “hypothetically speaking… if two people were, I don’t know, dating… and they maybe wanted to… level up…”

You looked at him. He looked at you. And suddenly the air felt heavier.

“This is dumb,” he muttered under his breath, then immediately straightened up. “Not dumb. Not dumb. Just— statistically nerve-wracking.” He rubbed the back of his neck, mask tails swaying nervously. “I’ve never, uh… done this before.”

Neither had you.

There was a long pause. The kind where you can hear your own heartbeat. Leo swallowed, stepped just a little closer, eyes flicking between yours and your lips before quickly darting away again.

“If this is weird, I’m blaming Donnie’s atmospheric pressure settings,” he whispered, trying — and failing — to mask how nervous he was.

And then he leaned in. Slow. Careful. Hesitant. Both of you figuring it out at the same time.

Chapter 16: Mockingbird —ft. Bayverse Raphael

Chapter Summary

> Raphael finds your notebook where you write songs, although you never sing any of them because you are too shy to sing in front of the rest.
>
> [soft!Raphael]

The city never really slept. It only changed sounds.

By day, it was horns and shouting and sirens bouncing between buildings. By night, it became humming neon signs, distant traffic rolling like thunder, pipes clanking in old apartment walls, and the occasional bark of a dog three streets over.

Raphael moved through all of it like he belonged to the dark.

Massive hands gripped brick ledges as he hauled himself up another fire escape, shell scraping lightly against rusted metal. He muttered under his breath when one step groaned too loud.

“Yeah, yeah. Keep it down,” he grumbled to the staircase like it had offended him.

He landed on the roof of your building with a heavy crouch, then straightened to his full height. Even hunched, he was enormous—broad shoulders, thick arms wrapped in weathered pads, red bandana tails flicking in the wind.

Most people would’ve called what he was doing insane. Sneaking into a girl’s apartment at midnight through her window?

Yeah. Probably insane.

But in Raph’s defense, he’d knocked on your fire escape window three nights in a row and you never heard him. Donnie said use your phone. Mikey said leave flowers. Leo said don’t break and enter.

Raph had ignored all three suggestions.

He crossed the rooftop in three silent steps and dropped onto the fire escape outside your window. The light inside your room was on.

Good.

He rapped his knuckles once against the glass. Nothing. He frowned and pressed his face closer. Your room was empty.

The bed was unmade, clothes tossed over a chair, a lamp glowing warm beside stacks of books and notebooks. He could hear faint movement somewhere deeper in the apartment.

Then the unmistakable hiss of running water.

Raph blinked. “Oh.”

Shower.

His face twisted immediately. “Great. Fantastic timing.”

He looked left. Right. Back at the window. Then, with the complete lack of good judgment that defined many of his life choices, he slid the window open and climbed inside.

The room was small by his standards—everything human-sized was annoyingly tiny—but it smelled like you. Soap, laundry detergent, something floral.

Raph stood awkwardly in the middle of it for a second, arms folded.

“Just waitin’,” he muttered to nobody. “Not snoopin’. Big difference.”

He paced once around the room, trying not to step on anything. His feet nearly crushed a hairbrush. He caught himself before knocking over a lamp.

“Tch. How do humans live like this?”

The shower still ran. He glanced toward the closed bedroom door, then back around the room. A wall with pinned photos. Some Polaroids. Ticket stubs. A string of cheap lights. A shelf of random trinkets. Stuffed animal in the corner.

Raph snorted. “Didn’t peg you for the stuffed animal type.”

He picked it up, stared at its stupid plush face, then set it back down carefully. His eyes moved to the desk. Papers everywhere. Pens. Open notebooks. A mug with dried paintbrushes in it.

And one thick, worn journal sitting near the edge. The cover was soft from use, corners bent, pages swollen like it had been opened a thousand times.

Raph approached it slowly. He shouldn’t. He knew he shouldn’t. He also knew curiosity had always been one of Mikey’s worst contagious traits.

He flipped the cover open. The first page was covered in scribbles, crossed-out lines, arrows, little notes in the margins. Then words. Verses. Choruses. Entire songs.

Raph’s brow furrowed. He turned another page. Then another. Rock lyrics. Soft acoustic ballads. Angry break-up songs. Funny songs with dumb rhymes. Something dramatic and

theatrical. Something heartbreakingly vulnerable.

Every page in your handwriting. Every line something you made.

His big fingers handled the paper more gently than anyone would expect from him.

“No way…” he muttered.

He sat heavily on the edge of your bed, book in hand. There were dates in the corners of some pages—years of them. You’d been writing these for a long time. Some had little notes beside them:

too embarrassing
never sing this one
good melody, bad lyrics
maybe if no one’s listening

Raph’s jaw tightened strangely. He could hear you laughing in his memory from the few times you’d sung along to the radio absentmindedly before realizing someone heard and immediately shutting up.

You always shrugged it off.

I’m not good.
I only sing alone.
It’s stupid.

Yet this book was packed full of pages. Full of effort. Full of feeling. Full of things you’d never shown anyone. He read one slower than the others. It was rougher, angrier. Sharp lines and scratched-out words. But it had punch. Real bite.

A smirk tugged at his mouth. “Heh. This one’s got attitude.”

Then he found another. Quiet, soft, about loneliness. The smirk faded. Raph shifted uncomfortably, glancing toward the bathroom where water still ran. He suddenly felt like he’d walked into something private in a way he hadn’t expected. Not because it was your room.

Because this was you. The part you kept hidden. And he was holding it in his hands.

He stared down at the page, then shut the book halfway.

“…Shouldn’ta opened it.”

But he didn’t put it down. Instead, he thumbed to another random page. Country song. He barked a laugh.

“Nope. Didn’t see that comin’.”

Another page. A dramatic love song with enough yearning to power Manhattan.

“Jeez.”

Another page. A silly nonsense song clearly written at two in the morning.

“Okay, that one’s kinda funny.”

He was still reading when the water stopped. Raph froze. Every muscle locked. The apartment suddenly felt ten times smaller. He snapped the book shut and looked around wildly.

“Aw, shell—”

A drawer? Too small. Closet? Definitely too small. Under the bed? Insulting suggestion.

He clutched the notebook in one hand and glared at the bedroom door like it had betrayed him.

Then footsteps. Closer.

Raph hissed under his breath, shoved the book behind his shell awkwardly, and planted himself beside the wall near the window like somehow a seven-foot mutant turtle could become invisible if he believed hard enough.

The doorknob turned. And for the first time that night, Raphael looked genuinely nervous. You stepped into your room in oversized pajamas, hair still damp from the shower, towel draped over one shoulder as you pushed the door shut behind you with your foot.

And immediately screamed.

“There’s a giant turtle in my room—”

“Shh! Yo, yo, it’s me!”

Raphael peeled himself away from the wall beside your window, hands raised quickly.

You clutched your chest. “Raph?!”

“Yeah, who else you know built like this?”

He gave a crooked grin, then paused. The grin changed. Softened. Because now he was actually looking at you. Hair damp. Sleep clothes hanging loose on you. Bare face. Slightly startled eyes.

His whole expression, which had been defensive and cocky a second ago, melted into something quieter. Warmer.

“…Hey,” he said, voice dropping lower.

It always happened like that. With everyone else, Raph came in sharp edges—growls, sarcasm, crossed arms, impatience, threats, attitude too big for the room.

With you? Something in him unclenched.

You narrowed your eyes. “Don’t ‘hey’ me. Why are you in my room?!”

He shrugged one shoulder. “Window was open.”

“It was closed.”

“Not anymore.”

You stared at him in disbelief. “You broke into my apartment.”

“I prefer visited unexpectedly.”

“You are unbelievable.”

“Yeah, I get that a lot.”

Then you noticed the familiar notebook tucked awkwardly half behind his side. Your expression changed immediately.

“…Raph.”

He instinctively moved it farther behind himself.

“Nope.”

“Is that my notebook?”

“Depends.”

“Raphael.”

He groaned like you were the difficult one here. “Alright, fine, yeah.”

“You went through my stuff?”

“I did not go through your stuff,” he shot back quickly. “I was standin’ there. It was sittin’ there. Then it opened.”

You blinked.

“It opened itself.”

“Basically.”

You walked toward him, arms crossed over your pajama top. “You read it?”

He scratched the back of his head, suddenly looking far less confident than a mutant ninja built like a tank should.

“A little.”

“How much is ‘a little’?”

He paused. “…There was a country song.”

Your jaw dropped. “Raph!”

“What?! I didn’t know it was gonna be country!”

You snatched the notebook from him, horrified, flipping through pages like the damage might be reversible.

“Oh my god. Oh my god.”

“It ain’t that bad.”

“It is that bad.”

“I liked some of ‘em.”

You looked up sharply. He shrugged again, trying to look casual.

“There’s a lotta junk in there too,” he added quickly. “But some were good.”

You narrowed your eyes. “You are impossible.”

“Yeah, yeah.”

You put the notebook on your desk protectively. He watched you fuss over it, then glanced away.

“Didn’t know you wrote that much,” he muttered.

You froze for half a second. Then softer: “I just… write stuff.”

“Mm.”

“Doesn’t mean anything.”

“Means enough to fill a whole book.”

You hated when he did that. When he cut straight through your excuses like they were paper. You sat on the edge of the bed and huffed.

“It’s private.”

“I know.”

“Then why’d you read it?”

He leaned back against the wall, folding thick arms across his plastron.

“Because I was waitin’.”

“That is a terrible reason.”

“Yeah.” A beat passed. Then: “Sing one.”

You looked up. “No.”

He tilted his head. “C’mon.”

“No.”

“You wrote all that and never sing it?”

“Not in front of people.”

“I ain’t people.”

“That is… not helping your case.”

He smirked. “You know what I mean.”

You grabbed a pillow and hugged it to your chest. “No chance.”

Raph pushed off the wall and came closer. For someone so huge, he could move weirdly quiet when he wanted.

“Just one.”

“No.”

“One verse.”

“No.”

“A chorus.”

“No.”

“A hum?”

You laughed despite yourself. “Absolutely not.”

He dropped to a crouch in front of you so he could look up at your face. The position looked ridiculous on someone his size, knees bent, elbows resting on them.

But his eyes were serious. “Please.”

You blinked. “Did you just say please?”

He grimaced. “Don’t make it weird.”

“You never beg.”

“I’m not beggin’.”

“You literally said please.”

“I’m askin’ aggressively.”

You snorted. He pointed at you. “See? You’re laughin’. That means I’m winnin’.”

“No, it means this is absurd.”

“Sing.”

“No.”

He groaned dramatically and let his forehead fall against your knee. The weight of it startled you.

“Raph—”

“Please,” he muttered into your pajama pants. “C’mon.”

You stared down at the giant turtle pouting against your leg. This was blackmail by cuteness.

“You are manipulative.”

“Yup.”

You hesitated. Then sighed. “Fine.”

His head snapped up instantly. “Yeah?”

“One song.”

He straightened so fast he nearly headbutted you. “I knew you’d crack.”

“Keep talking and I’ll change my mind.”

He zipped his mouth shut with two fingers. You reached for the notebook, flipping nervously through pages. Your pulse was suddenly ridiculous.

Raph noticed. His voice softened again.

“Hey.” You looked at him. “Don’t think about it too much.”

Easy for him to say.

You swallowed. Picked a page. Then stared at the words. The room felt too quiet. Too small. Too intimate. You almost backed out. Then Raph moved beside the bed and sat on the floor, leaning his shell against the mattress, arms resting on his knees.

Not looking directly at you. Giving you space.

“Whenever,” he said quietly.

So you started. Softly at first. Barely above a whisper. Your voice trembled on the first line, then steadied on the second. By the chorus it warmed, richer than you let anyone hear, filling the little bedroom with something vulnerable and bright.

Raph didn’t interrupt. Didn’t joke. Didn’t move. He just listened. Really listened. And when you finally finished, hands gripping the notebook tight, the silence afterward felt louder than the song.

You dared glance down at him. Raphael was staring at the floor. Jaw tight. Eyes oddly distant. Then he cleared his throat.

“…Again.”

You blinked. “What?”

He looked up, expression rough around the edges in the way it got whenever he felt too much and hated it.

“I said again.”

A small smile tugged at your mouth. “That sounded suspiciously like begging.”

Raphael rolled his eyes and leaned his head back against the side of your bed.

“Don’t push it.”

“You’re blushing.”

“I am not blushing.”

“You absolutely are.”

“That’s the room light.”

“It’s a lamp.”

“It’s aggressive.”

You smiled wider, hugging the notebook to your chest. Something had changed. The fear that usually gripped your throat whenever anyone heard you sing… it wasn’t gone completely, but it had loosened. The room didn’t feel like a stage waiting to judge you anymore.

It just felt like your bedroom. And Raph. Huge, stubborn, secretly soft Raph sitting on your floor pretending he hadn't just been emotionally moved into silence.

You flipped through the notebook again. He watched your hands move over the pages.

"You got more?"

"Maybe."

"Then quit stallin'."

You glanced down at him. "You're awfully demanding for someone who illegally entered my home."

"I came for a visit."

"You crawled through my window."

"Details."

You shook your head, then picked another song. This one was lighter. Playful. Something you'd written on a good day. You cleared your throat.

Raph shifted slightly, getting comfortable against the bed, one thick arm draped over a bent knee.

"Whenever," he said again, quieter this time.

So you began. Stronger now. No whispering. No shrinking into yourself. Your voice rose clear and warm through the room, bouncing softly off the walls. You even smiled mid-line when you reached a lyric you'd always liked.

Raph noticed that first. The smile. Then he slowly lifted his gaze from the floor. And finally looked at you while you sang. Really looked. You nearly stumbled over the next word. Because Raphael stared like he was seeing something rare.

Not with swagger. Not teasing. Not even the cocky amusement he usually wore like armor. Just open admiration, plain and unhidden. It made your chest tighten. You kept singing anyway.

Your fingers relaxed around the notebook. Your shoulders dropped. The nerves melted into something warm and brave under the weight of his attention.

Raph stayed perfectly still.

For someone always built out of motion—fists clenching, foot tapping, shoulders tensing, jaw grinding—his stillness meant more than words.

He was listening with everything. When you finished, he exhaled slowly like he'd forgotten to breathe. The room went quiet again. Then:

“…You been hidin’ that?”

You looked down shyly. “Maybe.”

“That’s stupid.”

You blinked. “Wow. Thank you.”

He sat forward quickly. “No—I mean—shell, that came out wrong.”

You laughed. Raph rubbed a hand over his face, annoyed at himself.

“I mean it’s stupid that you hide it,” he muttered. “You’re good.”

The compliment was blunt, rough-edged, completely lacking polish. Which somehow made it hit harder. You closed the notebook carefully.

“You really think so?”

He looked offended. “Why would I lie?”

“To mess with me?”

“Yeah, usually. Not now.”

You smiled softly. He pointed a thick finger at you.

“You got one of those voices that makes people shut up and listen.”

“That might be the nicest thing you’ve ever said to me.”

“Don’t tell anybody.”

“Too late.”

He snorted. You slid off the bed to sit beside him on the floor. The space was tight with his size, shoulder warm against yours, shell pressing lightly behind him. For a moment neither of you spoke. The city hummed outside the window. You leaned your head carefully against his arm.

Raph stiffened for half a second—automatic, instinctive—then relaxed. His head tilted until it rested lightly against the mattress above.

“Sing another,” he murmured.

“You just want a private concert now.”

“Yep.”

“You’re shameless.”

“Also yep.”

You opened the notebook again. This time you didn’t need convincing. You sang while leaning against him, voice soft in the dim light, and Raphael listened with his eyes half-lidded and a small, secret smile tugging at his mouth. Every now and then, when he thought you weren’t looking, he looked at you like you were something precious he didn’t quite know how to hold.

And because he was Raphael, when you caught him doing it, he immediately scowled.

“Keep singin’.”

You grinned and did exactly that.

Chapter 17: TAKEN FROM HIM -ft. 2012!Mikey

Chapter Summary

> [None of his brothers take him seriously —you do. So when you get captured by the Kraangs, he sees red.]

If anyone asked the turtles who the easiest one to tease was, the answer came too fast.

“Mikey.”

It was never said with cruelty—at least not intentionally. It was just… habit. Michelangelo was the youngest in spirit, the loudest, the weirdest, the one who talked too much and thought too sideways. He made jokes at the wrong time, got distracted by shiny wrappers, named things no one asked him to name, and somehow managed to turn every serious moment into chaos.

So naturally, his brothers rolled their eyes. Leonardo sighed at him. Raphael shoved him. Donatello corrected him. And Mikey laughed through all of it. That was the part no one noticed. He laughed through it.

You did, though. You noticed everything. You noticed how Mikey’s grin got a little too wide when he was hurt. How he’d joke harder when he felt ignored. How he acted even sillier when he wanted someone to take him seriously just once. You noticed he was smarter than everyone gave him credit for. You noticed he was lonely in a room full of people who loved him.

And because of that… you chose him.

Not in some dramatic declaration. Not all at once. Just in a hundred tiny moments. Like the first time you came to the lair after meeting them all. The others were arguing strategy with Splinter, and Mikey was trying to explain something no one was listening to.

“I’m telling you, I saw one of those weird brain guys near the alley yesterday!”

“Sure you did,” Raph muttered.

“It probably was a trash bag,” Donnie said.

“It had robot legs!”

“Trash bag with robot legs,” Raph replied.

Mikey groaned dramatically and threw himself backward over the couch. You walked in right then, setting down the snacks you'd brought.

"What happened?"

Mikey pointed accusingly at everyone. "They don't believe me."

You blinked. "About the brain thing?"

All four turtles looked at you.

"Yes" Mikey said, suddenly sitting up straighter.

You shrugged. "Why wouldn't I believe you?"

The room went quiet. Leo frowned. "You don't even know the full story."

"I know if Mikey says he saw something, he probably saw something."

Mikey stared at you like you'd just handed him the moon.

Raph barked a laugh. "Wow. Found the one person gullible enough."

You looked at him flatly. "Or maybe the one person smart enough to listen."

That time, Mikey laughed so hard he nearly fell off the couch.

Later that same night, a Kraang patrol was found exactly where Mikey said it had been. He never stopped bringing that up.

"Remember when Y/N trusted me and everyone else was WRONG?"

"Once," Leo muttered.

"Still counts!"

From then on, he followed you around like gravity had changed direction. If you sat, Mikey sat beside you. If you stood, he appeared nearby. If you laughed, he got louder. If you complimented him, he glowed for hours. And you did compliment him. Because unlike everyone else, you said things out loud.

"You did great today, Mikey."
"That plan was clever."
"You're really good with people."
"You always make things less scary."

He never knew what to do when praised. Usually he'd freeze, blink rapidly, then cover it with something ridiculous.

"Yeah, well… greatness is natural when you're this green."

Or—

“I know. I’m emotionally devastating.”

Or—

“Please hold your applause until after my pizza.”

But then he’d smile to himself when he thought no one was looking. You noticed that too. The hugs became normal faster than anyone expected. At first, they were quick side hugs. Then full ones. Then casual ones. Then random ones.

Mikey would walk past you and lean onto your shoulder. You’d open your arms automatically. He’d melt into them every single time.

Sometimes after rough patrols, he wouldn’t even say anything. He’d just shuffle toward you with tired eyes and open hands. And you’d hold him. No jokes. No teasing. Just warmth.

The first time you kissed his forehead absentmindedly while comforting him after Raph called him useless in a sparring match, the lair went silent. Even Raph looked stunned. Mikey looked like his soul had left his body.

You pulled back. “What?”

He made a tiny squeaking sound. Donnie slowly turned to Leo. “Did we just witness a fatality?”

Mikey then screamed into a pillow for three straight minutes. After that, he became impossible. He clung to your arm while walking. Rested his head in your lap during movie nights. Complained dramatically if you hugged one of his brothers first.

“Wow,” he’d say. “So betrayal is real.”

“You hugged Donnie because he handed you a soda.”

“He knew what he was doing.”

You laughed every time. That was the problem. You laughed at his jokes. Not politely. Not because you felt bad. You genuinely laughed. And Mikey, who had spent so long being background noise, found himself addicted to being heard by you.

He started watching doors for your arrival. Started saving the best slice for you. Started remembering everything you mentioned. Favorite candy. Favorite songs. The fact you hated thunderstorms. That your wrist hurt when it got cold. That you got quiet when sad.

He remembered all of it. He remembered you. And maybe that would have stayed sweet and harmless forever… if his brothers hadn’t started noticing just how different he was with you.

One evening in the lair, you were late. Only twenty minutes. But Mikey had checked the clock fourteen times.

“She said she’d be here.”

Leo looked up from training notes. “She’s probably busy.”

“She said six.”

“It’s six twenty.”

“Exactly.”

Raph snorted from the couch. “Bro, breathe.”

“I am breathing.”

“You look like a divorced dad waiting outside a restaurant.”

Donnie didn’t look away from his tablet. “Your heart rate elevated.”

“I am NORMAL,” Mikey snapped.

All three brothers stared. Because that tone —sharp, immediate, defensive— wasn’t normal.

Mikey blinked, realizing it too. Then he forced a grin. “Normal-ish.”

Raph narrowed his eyes. “Dude.”

Before anyone could say more, footsteps echoed down the tunnel. Your voice followed.

“Sorry! I brought empanadas!”

Mikey was gone before the sentence finished. He vaulted the couch, nearly tackled the table, sprinted across the lair, and reached you first.

“There you are!”

You laughed as he nearly crashed into your arms. “Hi to you too.”

He hugged you so tightly your feet lifted slightly. The brothers exchanged looks. Then they watched the way Mikey instantly softened—shoulders loose, eyes bright, voice warm, entire body calmer just because you’d arrived.

Raph muttered, “That’s insane.”

Leo crossed his arms slowly. Donnie adjusted his goggles. “Dependency pattern confirmed.”

Mikey didn’t hear any of it. Because he was too busy burying his face in your shoulder while you stroked the back of his head absentmindedly.

And for the first time, his brothers wondered something none of them had considered before…What happens if someone tries to take that away from him?

—

The first sign something was wrong was silence. You were never silent. Even when tired, you hummed. Even when upset, you sighed dramatically. Even when sneaking into the lair, you always announced yourself with some joke about sewer smell or turtle housekeeping standards. So when the clock passed your usual time and nothing came—no footsteps, no voice, no message—Mikey felt it before anyone said a word.

He stood near the entrance tunnel, staring.

“She’s late,” he said. “Again, and this time I have a bad feeling.”

Leo looked up from sharpening his swords. “It’s been ten minutes.”

“I’m telling you I have a bad feeling.”

“She has a life outside the lair, Mikey.”

“I know that,” he snapped.

The room went still. Mikey rarely snapped. He rubbed the back of his neck. “I just mean… she always tells us.”

Donnie’s fingers moved faster over his tablet. “Her phone is going straight to voicemail.”

Raph frowned. “Maybe battery died.”

“No,” Mikey said instantly. All eyes turned to him. He swallowed. “She charged it here yesterday. I reminded her to.”

That detail hung in the air. Of course he knew that. Of course he’d noticed.

Leo stood. “We wait fifteen more minutes, then we check her route.”

Mikey’s jaw tightened. “No. We go now.”

“We don’t rush blindly.”

“She could need us now.”

“And she could also just be delayed.”

Mikey took a step forward. “Leo.”

There was no humor in his voice. No whine. No childish exaggeration. Just something hard.

Leo straightened. “That’s an order.”

For once, Mikey didn’t immediately fold. The stare he gave his older brother was so flat it made even Raph glance over. Then—

A loud metallic clank echoed through the tunnel entrance.

Donnie spun first. “Movement.”

The turtles drew weapons. A small object rolled into the center of the lair. Your bracelet. Bent. Scorched. Still recognizable.

Mikey froze. He knew it instantly. He’d fixed the clasp for you last month.

Then the wall monitor flickered violently to life. Static. Purple distortion. A Kraang appeared onscreen, mechanical eye twitching.

“The female friend unit has been acquired for extraction experimentation.”

Raph surged forward. “You slime freak—”

“If the turtle organisms pursue, the female unit will receive damage.”

The screen shifted. You were there. Bound to a hovering restraint chair, dazed but conscious, struggling weakly.

“Mikey—!”

Static cut the sound. The transmission ended. For a second, no one moved. Then the room filled with noise all at once. Raph cursing. Donnie grabbing scanners. Leo barking orders.

And in the center of it Mikey stood absolutely still. Too still. His nunchucks slipped from his hands and hit the floor. No joke came. No panic. No shouting.

Just silence.

Then he bent, picked them up, and looked at Leo. “Location.”

Donnie answered quietly. “Signal bounce from an old Kraang outpost near the docks.”

Leo was already gearing up. “We move carefully. They want us emotional.”

Mikey walked past him. “No,” he said.

Leo caught his arm. “We move together.”

Mikey slowly looked down at the hand touching him. Something in his expression made Leo release it. Because this wasn’t the goofy brother they knew. This was someone stripped raw.

“They took her,” Mikey said, voice low and empty. “Because they know she matters.”

“We’ll get her back,” Leo said carefully.

“You’ll try.”

“Mikey.”

“I’ll do it.”

He started toward the exit. Raph stepped in front of him. “You’re not going solo.”

Mikey’s eyes lifted to meet his. Usually they were bright, expressive, playful. Now they were cold.

“I won’t slow down for you.”

Raph stiffened. Donnie spoke cautiously. “Your emotional state is compromising your judgment.”

Mikey turned to him next. “Then stay out of my way too.”

Donnie actually took a step back. Leo moved again, leader voice firm. “Enough. We are doing this as a team.”

Mikey gave a short, humorless laugh. “A team?” Nobody spoke. Because he kept going. “Funny. When I said I saw Kraang, I was stupid. When I had ideas, I was annoying. When I worried about her being late, I was dramatic.”

Each word landed sharper than shouting would have.

“But now that she’s gone, suddenly we’re a team.”

Leo’s face tightened. “That’s not fair.”

“No?” Mikey asked quietly. “Neither is her being there alone.”

Then he vaulted past them and disappeared into the tunnel. Raph cursed and ran after him. The others followed.

The Kraang outpost was a dead warehouse wrapped around hidden machinery, pulsing purple beneath rusted steel. The turtles landed on the rooftop. Leo signaled formation. Mikey was already gone.

“He went through the skylight?!” Donnie hissed.

A crash exploded below. Raph grinned despite himself. “Guess subtle’s dead.”

They dropped in after him. What they found stunned them. Three Kraang droids dismantled. One embedded in a wall. Another sparking in half. And Mikey in the center, spinning his nunchucks with brutal precision.

No theatrics. No sound effects. No goofy battle cries. Just efficiency. A Kraang charged him with an electro-staff. Mikey caught the strike, yanked the droid forward, and slammed his shell into its faceplate hard enough to shatter it.

Raph blinked. “Dang.”

Leo shouted, “Mikey, left side!”

Mikey moved before the warning finished, disarming another Kraang without looking. Then he said, flatly—

“I know.”

The brothers exchanged looks. They pushed deeper into the base, but Mikey stayed ahead of them like a storm front. Every locked door was broken. Every enemy hit the floor. Every time someone tried to slow him down, he was already moving. At one corridor split, Leo grabbed his shoulder again.

“We need a plan.”

Mikey ripped free so sharply Leo nearly stumbled. “My plan is finding her.”

“You’re compromising the mission!”

Mikey stepped close enough that even Leo went silent. “My mission,” he said, voice like ice, “is her.”

Then he ran down the right corridor. No one followed for a second. Because none of them had ever seen him like this. Raph muttered, almost to himself—

“They really messed up taking the wrong person.”

At the end of the corridor, a blast door hissed open. Inside, you were strapped to the chair, weakly fighting restraints. Your eyes lifted.

“Mikey…”

Everything changed instantly. The cold face shattered. His shoulders dropped. His eyes widened with raw panic. He crossed the room in seconds.

“Hey—hey, I’m here, I’m here.”

His hands shook as he tore the restraints apart. You nearly fell forward, and he caught you like you were made of glass.

“I’m sorry,” he whispered. “I’m sorry I was late.”

You stared at him, exhausted. “You came.”

“Always.”

Behind him, the brothers arrived and stopped in the doorway. Watching. Mikey held you close, one hand cradling the back of your head. He pressed his face into your hair like he needed proof you were real.

Then, softly—so softly it barely sounded like the same person—

“Did they hurt you?”

You shook your head weakly. “Just scared me.”

His grip tightened. For one dangerous second, his eyes flicked toward the corridor with that same freezing darkness. Then you touched his cheek. And it vanished. Just like that. He melted into your hand.

Leo exhaled slowly. Raph muttered, “That’s terrifying.”

Donnie nodded. “And it’s scientifically fascinating.”

Mikey ignored them all. He lifted you carefully into his arms.

“You’re okay now,” he murmured. And no one—not even his brothers—dared joke about him clinging to you ever again.

Chapter 18: SMILING THROUGH IT —ft. 2012!Leonardo

Chapter Summary

> [You like him. He likes Karai. So you step away. Raph notices this and when you get hurt, he explodes against Leo.]

The lair was louder than usual. Mikey had discovered some new online challenge involving balancing slices of pizza on your forehead while doing backflips, which naturally meant Donnie was recording it “for scientific documentation,” and Raph was shouting that if one more piece of pepperoni landed on his weights bench, someone was going through a wall.

You laughed with them. You always laughed with them. Even now, sitting cross-legged on the couch with a paper plate in your lap, you smiled as Mikey dramatically slipped, fell backward, and blamed gravity like it had personally betrayed him.

“You saw that, right?” Mikey cried from the floor. “The Earth attacked me!”

“It’s called consequences,” Raph muttered.

Donnie didn’t even glance up from his tablet. “Actually, it’s called poor motor planning.”

You laughed again. Because laughing was easy. Pretending was easy too, at least by now. What wasn’t easy was the way your eyes kept drifting across the room toward him.

Leonardo stood near the large screen by Splinter’s chair, arms folded, posture straight even while off-duty. Calm, focused, always carrying himself like he had somewhere important to be. Blue mask tails rested over his shoulder, and every now and then he’d glance toward the tunnel entrance like he was waiting for something. Or someone.

Your chest tightened. You knew that look.

Then, as if summoned by your thoughts, Leo’s T-Phone beeped. His whole face changed. It was subtle—so subtle most people probably wouldn’t notice. But you noticed everything about him. The slight lift of his brows. The tiny shift in his mouth. The alertness in his eyes.

Hope.

He tapped the screen quickly. “Karai.”

You looked down at your pizza.

Mikey grinned. “Oooohhh.”

Raph groaned loudly. “Seriously?”

“It may be mission-related,” Leo said, immediately defensive.

Donnie finally glanced up. “Statistically, your tone suggests otherwise.”

Leo shot him a glare and walked toward the quieter side of the lair, voice lowering as he answered. You kept your smile in place.

“Hey,” you said lightly, nudging Mikey’s shoulder. “Go again. I think you can fail harder this time.”

“Thank you,” Mikey said solemnly. “A true supporter of the arts.”

They laughed. You laughed too. But the sound felt wrong coming out of you. Because across the room, Leo was smiling at someone else.

You never blamed him for it. That was the worst part. If Leo had been cruel, careless, selfish—if he’d led you on or used your feelings—it would’ve been easier to hate him a little. Easier to move on. But Leonardo was none of those things. He was kind. Protective. Earnest in a way that made your heart ache.

He checked if you got home safe after patrols. He noticed when you were cold and handed you blankets. He listened when you spoke, really listened, like your words mattered. He trained with you patiently. Encouraged you. Trusted you.

And he looked at Karai like the world sharpened into focus whenever she entered it. So no, you couldn’t hate him. You just had to hate how much it hurt.

Later that night, you joined Leo in the dojo. He was practicing alone, katana slicing through the air with crisp precision. Each movement controlled, disciplined, beautiful.

You stood in the doorway. “You’re going to wear grooves into the floor.”

Without looking, he said, “Then maybe Donnie will finally replace it.”

You smiled faintly. “Optimistic.”

He lowered his swords and turned. The second he saw you, his expression softened. There it was again. That warmth he gave you so naturally. That warmth you kept mistaking for something more.

“Hey,” he said. “Couldn’t sleep?”

“Something like that.”

He gestured with one sword. “Spar?”

Normally you would’ve said yes instantly. Tonight, you shrugged. “Sure.”

The match started light. Familiar. Easy rhythm. Leo always adjusted to whoever he fought. With you, he was steady and respectful, never patronizing, never reckless. He knew your habits. Knew when you overcommitted. Knew how to counter your left-side feints.

He knew you. Which somehow made everything worse. You struck harder. Faster.

He blocked, surprised. “Whoa—”

You lunged again. Steel clashed.

“Easy,” he said, stepping back.

You pressed forward anyway. Because if you stopped moving, you might feel too much. Because if you kept swinging, maybe the ache in your chest would become something simpler. Something physical. He disarmed you in one smooth motion. Your weapon clattered across the floor. Silence.

Leo frowned. “What’s going on?”

“Nothing.”

“That’s not true.”

You bent to grab your training blade. “I’m just tired.”

“You’re upset.”

“I said I’m fine.”

The sharpness in your voice made both of you pause. Leo’s eyes narrowed—not angry, concerned. Always concerned.

“You don’t have to do that with me,” he said quietly.

“Do what?”

“Pretend.”

Your throat tightened. For one reckless second, you almost told him everything. That you were tired of pretending. Tired of being the cheerful friend. Tired of standing two feet away while he talked about Karai like she hung the moon. Tired of wondering if maybe, in some other life, he could’ve looked at you that way.

But you swallowed it down. Because what would be the point? So instead, you forced a laugh.

“You spend too much time meditating, Leo. You’re imagining hidden emotions now.”

He didn’t laugh back. “You know you can talk to me.”

I know, you thought. That’s the problem l. “Nothing to talk about,” you said.

You walked past him before your face could betray you. He didn't stop you.

Your room felt too quiet. You shut the door softly, leaned against it, and finally let your smile drop. The mask was exhausting. You sat on the edge of the bed and stared at your hands. You'd done the right thing. That's what you kept telling yourself.

Leo liked Karai. Maybe always would. And Karai… complicated as she was… cared about him in her own way. Whatever existed there, it was real enough that your feelings had no place in it. So you backed off. Good friends did that. Good people didn't make things harder. Good people smiled and moved on. Right?

Your eyes burned. You wiped them angrily before tears could fall.

"Nope," you muttered to yourself. "Not doing this."

You stood, changed clothes, busied your hands with meaningless tasks. Rearranged books. Folded a hoodie. Cleaned a shelf that wasn't dirty. Anything but think. Anything but imagine Leo smiling at his T-Phone again. Anything but admit that moving on was proving harder than loving him in silence.

Then there was a knock. Gentle. Familiar.

"Hey," Leo's voice came through the door. "You okay?"

You froze. For one pathetic moment, hope surged anyway. You hated that. You schooled your voice carefully. Bright. Casual. Effortless.

"Yeah! Just tired."

A pause. Then: "…Okay. Goodnight."

His footsteps faded. You waited until they were gone before sitting back down on the bed. And this time, the tears came quietly.

The next few days passed the same way the others usually did. You smiled when expected. You joked when Mikey threw himself dramatically across furniture. You listened to Donnie rant about circuitry and "the intellectual bankruptcy of poor cable management."

You trained. You helped on patrol. You acted normal.

And for everyone else, maybe that was enough. But Raphael noticed things most people assumed he didn't. He noticed how you laughed half a second too late now. How your shoulders tensed whenever Karai's name came up. How you always found some reason to leave the room when Leo answered his T-Phone. How you were eating less. Sleeping less.

Smiling wider.

That last one bothered him the most. Because fake smiles made Raph angrier than punches ever did.

He stood in the kitchen area one evening, arms folded, watching you rinse dishes after dinner. You were humming softly like nothing in the world was wrong.

The plate in your hand slipped slightly. You caught it, but your fingers trembled. That did it.

“Yo,” Raph said.

You glanced back. “Yo yourself.”

“Need help?”

“With dishes?” You snorted. “What are you, possessed?”

“Cute.” He pushed off the wall and walked over. “Move.”

You stepped aside automatically, and he took the towel, drying the dishes with much more aggression than necessary. You watched him for a second. “You’re breaking that plate with attitude alone.”

“Good.”

You smiled. There it was again. That polished, careful smile. Raph hated it instantly.

He set the plate down harder than needed and looked at you. “Knock it off.”

Your brows lifted. “Knock what off?”

“That.”

“Very descriptive.”

“The act.”

You went still. Then you laughed lightly. “Wow. You and Leo been sharing detective notes?”

Raph’s jaw tightened. “Leo doesn’t know squat.”

That got your attention. You turned to face him properly now. “Raph—”

“No, seriously.” He threw the towel onto the counter. “Guy can memorize every battle strategy in history but can’t see what’s right in front of his face.”

“Raph.”

“He’s out there moonin’ over Karai while you’re in here miserable, and somehow I’m the one supposed to pretend this is fine?”

Your expression softened with something tired.“I’m not miserable.”

“Don’t insult me.”

The words came out rough, but not cruel. Never cruel with you.mYou looked away first. The silence stretched.

Raph exhaled through his nose and leaned back against the counter. “Why ain’t you mad at him?”

“Because he didn’t do anything wrong.”

“He did somethin’ wrong by bein’ blind.”

You almost laughed again, but this time it was real for half a second. “That’s not how feelings work.”

“No? Feels pretty simple to me.”

“Of course it does.” You crossed your arms. “You punch first and think later.”

“And you think so much you let people break your heart politely.”

That landed. You flinched so faintly most people wouldn’t have seen it. Raph saw everything.

His voice lowered. “…Sorry.”

You shook your head. “No. You’re not wrong.”

For a moment, neither of you spoke. The lair noises echoed faintly in the distance—Mikey yelling about stolen pudding cups, Donnie denying involvement, Splinter telling someone to stop screaming indoors.

Normal life. Meanwhile, this little corner of the kitchen felt strangely separate. You leaned your hip against the counter beside him.

“I’ll move on,” you said quietly.

Raph looked at you. “Yeah?”

“I have to.”

“You don’t gotta do anything.”

“I’m not going to sit around hoping Leo wakes up one day and magically notices me.”

Raph muttered, “Would serve him right if he did.”

You nudged his arm lightly. “Be nice.”

“No.”

That earned a small smile. A genuine one. It made his chest do something inconvenient. Raph had always had a soft spot for you. That part was easy to admit. You were brave in ways

people missed. Kind without making a show of it. Stronger than you knew. And when you looked at someone, you really looked at them.

Somewhere along the way, that soft spot had turned into something messier. Something he kept buried, because Leo was his brother. Because you looked at Leo the way no one ever looked at Raph. Because wanting things didn't mean you got them. Still… seeing you hurt over someone else made ugly feelings stir in his chest.

"Maybe you shouldn't move on," he said before thinking.

You blinked. "What?"

He straightened immediately. "I mean—maybe you shouldn't force it."

Smooth, genius. You gave him a curious look, but let it pass.

"I'm not forcing it," you said. "I'm choosing it."

"That sounds fake."

"It probably is."

Your honesty hit him harder than expected. You stared down at the counter. "I care about him. So I'm stepping back. That's what friends do."

Raph scoffed. "Nah. That's what martyrs do."

You laughed under your breath. Then your eyes glistened before you could stop them. Raph's whole body tensed. He hated tears. Not because they were weak—because they meant someone had already been hurt.

He looked away to give you dignity. "C'mere," he muttered.

"What?"

"Don't make me repeat myself."

You hesitated only a second before stepping closer. Raph wrapped one thick arm around your shoulders and tugged you against his side. It was awkward at first. He was too big, too warm, too solid. Then it wasn't awkward at all. You sagged into him like you'd been holding yourself upright for days. He swallowed hard and rested his chin lightly on your head.

"Guy's an idiot," he said.

You made a muffled sound against his plastron. "Raph."

"He is."

"He's just confused."

"He's an idiot and confused."

Despite everything, you laughed softly. Better. That sound was better. After a while, you pulled back, wiping quickly under your eyes.

“Thanks.”

“Yeah.”

“And don’t scold Leo.”

Raph frowned immediately. “Why not?”

“Because this isn’t his fault.”

“It’s a little his fault.”

“It’s not.”

“He could at least pay attention.”

You shook your head. “Please.”

Raph grumbled something deeply insulting under his breath. Then, because it was you asking, he relented.

“…Fine.”

You smiled tiredly. “I’ll move on. No need to worry.”

Raph stared at you for a long moment. He knew a lie when he heard one. But this one wasn’t meant for him. It was meant for yourself. And somehow that made it sadder.

“Yeah,” he said quietly. “Sure.”

You headed toward your room after that. At the doorway, you glanced back. “Raph?”

“What?”

“You’re a good friend.”

You disappeared down the hall before he could answer. Raph stood alone in the kitchen, fists clenching at his sides.

Good friend. Right.

From the training room, Leo’s voice echoed as he laughed at something on his T-Phone.

Raph’s expression darkened instantly “Unbelievable.”

—

It happened fast. Too fast for anyone to stop it. The mission had already been a mess from the start—Foot Clan movement in the warehouse district, Kraang tech mixed in where it shouldn't be, and Karai insisting she could handle herself while Leo insisted on backing her up.

Which meant everyone else had to come too. Which meant tension.

Raph had been in a foul mood the second Karai joined them on the rooftops. Donnie kept muttering that the tactical variables had "tripled in annoyance." Mikey tried to lighten the mood by naming pigeons. You stayed quiet. Too quiet.

Raph noticed that too. He noticed how you never once complained when Leo immediately moved beside Karai. How you volunteered to take rear watch. How you didn't look at Leo unless necessary.

Moved on, huh? Yeah. Sure.

Inside the warehouse, everything spiraled. The Kraang device wasn't inactive—it was bait. Foot soldiers dropped from the rafters. Purple energy beams tore through crates. Steel clashed, shouts echoed, Mikey yelled something about unfair workplace conditions, and everyone split into motion.

Leo and Karai fought back-to-back. Raph bulldozed through three Foot ninjas at once. Donnie disabled a drone. You covered Mikey's blind side. Then the machine in the center of the room powered up with a shriek.

Donnie's eyes widened. "That's not a portal stabilizer—everybody move!"

Too late. A blast of raw energy shot loose, unstable and wild, ricocheting across metal supports. Karai stumbled after taking a hit from a Foot ninja, dropping to one knee directly in its path. Leo shouted her name. He lunged. But he was too far. You were closer. You didn't think.

That was the truth of it. There was no grand speech, no noble pause, no heroic smile. Just instinct. You threw yourself forward and shoved Karai aside. The blast hit you full force. The sound that came out of Leo's throat didn't sound human. Your body slammed into a stack of crates hard enough to splinter wood. Then you hit the concrete and didn't move.

Everything stopped.mEven the Foot ninjas faltered. Raph was the first one there.

"NO!"

He dropped beside you so hard the floor shook. Your breathing was shallow, wrong. Blood streaked from your temple. Your arm bent at an angle it shouldn't.

Your eyes were half-open, unfocused. Raph's hands hovered, terrified to touch too hard.

"Hey—hey, c'mon," he said, voice cracking. "Nah. Nah, you stay with me."

Leo arrived a second later, pale with horror. You looked past Raph. Straight at Leo. Your lips moved weakly. No sound came out. Then your eyes rolled back.

Raph rounded on Leo so fast Donnie barely intercepted him. “This is YOUR fault!”

“Raph!” Donnie shouted.

“You dragged her here for HER!” Raph roared, pointing at Karai. “Always her!”

Leo looked like he’d been struck. “I didn’t—”

“You never saw anything! Never saw what she felt, never saw what this was doin’ to her, never saw ANYTHING!”

“Raph, enough!” Donnie commanded.

But Raph was shaking with rage. Because under the rage was fear. And under the fear was grief.

You were carried home that night in Leo’s arms. You never woke up.

Days turned into weeks. The lair changed. It grew quieter. Mikey stopped joking as much. Donnie buried himself in medical scans, equipment, research—anything that might help. Splinter meditated longer than usual.

Karai came more than anyone expected. She sat beside your bed sometimes in silence, guilt shadowing her face. She once whispered, “You fool,” but her voice broke on the second word.

Raph barely left your side. He’d sit in the chair too small for him, arms folded, glaring at machines like intimidation might fix them. Sometimes he’d talk to you. Mostly he’d complain.

“Leo’s mopin’ around.”
Pause.
“Donnie hasn’t slept.”
Pause.
“Mikey tried makin’ soup. It was disgusting.”

He’d clear his throat afterward. “You should wake up and tell him yourself.”

Leo came too. At first only when no one else was there. He’d stand in the doorway like he didn’t deserve to enter. Then eventually he sat beside the bed. He spoke quietly, eyes fixed on the floor.

“I should’ve seen it.”

Another day:n“I kept thinking there’d be more time.”

Another: “You saved someone who hurt you just by existing in the wrong place.”

Then, voice breaking: “You always were better than me.”

No answer ever came. Until the twenty-third morning.

You woke to the sound of arguing.

“Keep your elbow outta my face!”
“It is not in your face, it is adjacent to your face.”
“That’s my chair!”
“You do not own chairs!”

Your eyelids felt heavy. Your throat burned. The room blurred into shapes, then colors, then faces. Mikey asleep on the floor with a comic over his face. Donnie and Raph bickering in whispers. Splinter near the door, suddenly standing. Leo in the corner. He was on his feet before anyone else realized your eyes were open.

“…Y/N?”

The room froze. Raph turned so fast he nearly broke the chair.

“Holy— GUYS!”

Chaos followed. Mikey screamed loud enough to wake the dead. Donnie started checking monitors and pulse readings at machine-gun speed. Splinter’s eyes softened with visible relief. Raph was beside the bed instantly, gripping the rail so hard it creaked.

“You took your sweet time,” he said, voice rough.

You tried to laugh. It came out as a rasp. Mikey burst into tears.

“Nope! Nope, I’m not crying, my eyes are celebrating!”

Even Donnie wiped at his face and pretended it was allergies.mThen Leo stepped closer. He looked awful. Weeks of guilt sat on him like armor made of stone.

“Can I…?” he asked softly.

Raph looked ready to object.nYou gave the tiniest nod. The others backed away, giving space. Leo came to your bedside slowly.

“I’m sorry,” he said immediately, like he’d rehearsed it a thousand times. “I’m sorry I didn’t notice. I’m sorry I was blind. I’m sorry you got hurt. I’m sorry I let you carry that alone.”

Your eyes rested on him. You had once wanted nothing more than to hear those words. Funny how life worked. Weeks asleep had done something strange. The pain had dulled. The wanting had loosened its grip. You still cared for him. Maybe always would in some quiet corner of yourself.

But the ache was gone.

You reached weakly for his hand. He took it carefully, almost trembling.

“It’s okay,” you whispered.

His eyes filled instantly. “No, it isn’t.”

“It is.”

Because it was. Not what happened. Not the injuries. Not the lost time. But the feelings? The longing? The wound of wanting someone who couldn’t return it?

That had healed while your body slept.

You gave him a faint, tired smile. “I moved on, Leo.”

The words hit him harder than shouting ever could. He bowed his head. There was grief there. Regret too. Maybe even realization that had come too late.

But he nodded. Because Leonardo, for all his faults, knew when truth had arrived.

“I understand,” he said quietly.

Raph, from behind him, muttered, “Good.”

You smiled wider. Then winced immediately.

“Ow.”

Mikey gasped. “No smiling! Doctor’s orders!”

“I am the closest thing here to a doctor,” Donnie snapped, “and I gave no such order.”

Raph snorted. Splinter chuckled softly. And for the first time in weeks, the lair sounded alive again. Leo stepped back, tears discreetly wiped away.

Raph moved into the space without hesitation, huge hand carefully resting over yours “Welcome back,” he said.

You squeezed weakly. This time, when you smiled—

It was real.

Chapter 19: NEW PERFUME —ft. Bayverse Raphael

Chapter Summary

[SLIGHT NSFW, read under your own responsibility.]

Raph was your boyfriend. The usually short tempered turtle was completely the opposite when he was with you.

He knew the size difference between you two, and he treated you like if you were made of glass. He would become a cuddly turtle when you two were in his room alone.

Which is what you two are doing now. You feel him shifting on the bed to hide his face on the crook of your neck.

“Hmmm…”

You look down at him and raise an eyebrow when he doesn’t lift his head from your neck for a while.

“Raph? You fell asleep or something?” you giggle softly.

“You changed your perfume?” he asks quietly, smelling your neck, rubbing his snout against your neck while his strong arms are wrapped around your waist.

“My perfume? oh, I used a different one since my sister took mine” you say, raising your eyebrow.

His arms tightened subtly around your waist, pulling you even closer into the warmth of his broad shell. He hummed a low, gravelly vibration against your throat, like a purring engine.

"I like it," he grumbled, the words muffled against your skin. "Sweet, but... different. Makes you smell like mine, even if you didn't try."

He shifted his weight, the mattress creaking beneath his muscular form, and tilted his head back just enough to fix his eyes—dark and intense—on yours. A larger, three-fingered hand slid up your arm, his calloused palm brushing stray hairs away from your jawline.

"Don't get me wrong, I like the old one," he rasped, his breath hot and smelling faintly of old leather and the rain, "but this one... has to stay."

“You like it?” you smile softly, oblivious to the reaction your perfume was making inside of him. “I’m glad you like it”

A low, rumbling growl originates in his chest, vibrating through both of you as he catches your chin with his thumb and forefinger. He doesn't look away; he fixes you with a stare that makes the air thick and heavy, his pupils dilating to black pools.

“Glad?” His thumb traces the line of your bottom lip with rough, deliberate pressure. “I’m fucking obsessed.”

He shifts his hips, trapping you beneath his solid weight, making sure you feel the hard proof of just how much he likes the new scent pressing against your inner thigh.

“Might have to mark you with it all night,” he rumbles, his breath skimming your ear, “so every time you move, you remember who hits that scent.”

His hand slides down to grip the curve of your hip possessively, squeezing with enough force to pin you in place while he continues to taste the perfume on your pulse point.

“Raph-“

His green lips curled into a smirk against your neck, a rough tongue dragging a stripe right over the frantic pulse beating there.

"Raph" he echoed, mocking your breathless tone with a guttural rasp.

"Don't start begging yet, sweetheart."

He pinned your wrists above your head with one massive hand, the other sliding down to your waistband to bunch the fabric tight against your skin. The air in the room felt suddenly charged, electric with the smell of his musk overpowering your cheap scent.

His hips grounded into yours, a heavy friction that promised nothing but relentless, animalistic effort. He nipped at your jaw, teeth sharp enough to brand but careful enough to leave you aching.

"You wanted attention. You got it. Now stay still while I take it."

“Honey- I don’t want now, you know- stressful day, bla bla bla…” you whisper quietly.

His body went rigid, a tense statue hovering over you. The heat in his eyes cooled instantly, not into anger but a sharp, wary focus. He shifted his weight back half an inch, removing the crushing pressure but keeping his hands firmly on your wrists—a check-in, not a release.

"Alright," he grunted, the word sounded like it scraped his throat raw. He tilted his head, his snout brushing your cheek once, a silent question. "Just... tell me what you need. Or if you just want to stay like this."

You puff your cheeks and wrap your arms around his neck. “Can we just cuddle?”

Raph let out a short, incredulous huff of air, his defensive tension melting into something softer. "Cuddle? You're killing me."

He rolled off to the side, the mattress groaning under his weight, but his arms never let go. He pulled your back firmly against his plastron, curling a thick, scaled limb around your waist to lock you against his chest. A shaky exhale ruffled the hair at your temple as he buried his nose there, the scent of you filling his senses.

"Fine," he grumbled, the word vibrating against your skin. "But you're not moving an inch. You smell too damn good to let go of."

You smile pressing your back against his plastron and closing your eyes. “Sorry for not being in the mood for sex” you apologise.

His arm tightened around you, pulling you flush against his chest. The rumbling in his chest started again, deep and soft this time.

"Don't apologize." His voice was a low growl, but it was tender, roughened gravel against your ear. "Sometimes... it's just about being close."

He pressed his forehead to the back of your head, taking a slow, deep breath as if he could inhale the scent of you and the new perfume, committing it all to memory. His hand, still resting on your hip, squeezed gently, a silent 'thank you'.

He settled his weight, a heavy, grounding presence against your spine. The rapid beating of his heart slowed to match the rhythm of your breathing, a steady thud against your back. His fingers traced idle patterns over your stomach, the scaled tips catching faintly on the fabric of your shirt.

He exhaled through his nose, a warm puff of air that stirred your hair.

"That scent ain't goin' nowhere," he murmured, lips brushing the shell of your ear. "Just sleep, baby. I got you."

A low rumble vibrated through his chest, a sound that felt less like a purr and more like a generator slowly winding down. His arms, like bands of warm iron, didn't loosen their grip on you.

He shifted, his bulk resettling against the headboard, creating a nest of stone and muscle meant to hold you safely.

The sound of his breathing evened out, becoming a deep, steady foundation beneath your own.

Chapter 20: HAPPY BIRTHDAY —ft. Rise!Raphael

The lair was loud in the way it usually was.

Somewhere in the kitchen, Michelangelo was arguing with the toaster like it had insulted his family. Donatello was muttering to himself over wires and sparks at the workbench. Leonardo was sprawled upside down on the couch, tossing a game controller from hand to hand like he had not a single responsibility in the world. And Raphael was pretending not to care while absolutely caring.

He stood near the center platform with his arms crossed, watching Mikey hold up a giant handmade banner that read:

HAPPY BIRTHDAY!!!

There were glitter stars glued crookedly onto it. One of the letters had fallen off and been taped back upside down.

“It’s beautiful” Leo said solemnly.

“It’s art” Mikey corrected.

“It’s a fire hazard” Donnie added without looking up.

Raph exhaled through his nose. “It’s fine. Just hang it already.”

Mikey narrowed his eyes. “You’re weirdly tense.”

“I am not tense.”

“You’re standing like you’re about to punch a refrigerator.”

“That is just how I stand.”

Leo grinned from the couch. “Someone’s got a crush.”

Raph’s glare snapped toward him so fast it nearly caused structural damage. “I do not.”

“Oh, wow,” Leo said. “Defensive too. Confirmed.”

Raph stomped over and snatched the controller out of his hand, chucking it onto the cushions. “Can you be useful for once in your life?”

“I am useful,” Leo said. “I bring emotional truth to this family.”

Donnie finally glanced up. “No. You bring noise.”

Mikey dropped down from the ladder and dusted glitter off his hands. “Guys. Focus. This is important.”

That made the room settle. Because it was. You had never told them when your birthday was. Not once. They’d known you for months now—long enough for you to become part of the lair without anyone really noticing when it happened. You were just… there. Sitting beside Donnie while he worked. Letting Mikey paint your nails ridiculous colors. Trading insults with Leo. Falling asleep on the couch with your feet in Raph’s lap like it was the most natural thing in the world.

You showed up when things got hard. You vanished when things got too personal. And every time anyone asked about family, holidays, birthdays, childhood memories…you changed the subject so fast it gave everyone whiplash.

It had been Donnie, of course, who found out.

“I was not snooping,” he’d said flatly.

“You hacked government records,” Leo had replied.

“I accessed public documentation.”

“You committed crimes with vocabulary.”

But the point remained. Your birthday was tomorrow. And when they realized you’d never celebrated it with them, Mikey had gasped like this was a moral failing they all shared.

So now there were decorations. Cake in the fridge. Music queued up. Presents stacked on the table. And Raph had spent three straight hours helping because, for reasons he refused to name, the thought of you smiling at something made for you had rooted itself under his shell.

“You sure they’re coming today?” Mikey asked.

Raph answered immediately. “Yeah.” Three heads turned. Raph stiffened. “They texted.”

Leo waggled his brows. Raph looked ready to commit violence.

Donnie checked the time. “Estimated arrival in six minutes.”

Mikey clapped his hands. “Positions!”

The lair exploded into movement. Leo dove behind the couch dramatically. Donnie dimmed the lights. Mikey hid beside the kitchen entrance, barely concealed by a plant that did not conceal him at all. Raph stood in the center of the room.

Then moved behind a pillar. Then moved back. Then crossed his arms. Then uncrossed them.

“Bro,” Leo whispered. “You look like you’re about to propose.”

“Shut up.”

Footsteps echoed faintly down the tunnel. Everyone froze. The sound got closer. Your familiar rhythm. Slight drag on the left foot when you were tired. Bag brushing the wall. Keys jingling. Raph's heart kicked hard enough to annoy him. The entrance curtain shifted.

You stepped inside. Tired eyes. Hoodie too big. Hair messy from wind. Grocery bag looped around one wrist. You looked around the dim room with mild confusion.

"Guys?"

Mikey leapt out first. "SURPRIIIISE—!"

Lights flashed on. Leo popped up from behind the couch. Donnie triggered a confetti cannon that malfunctioned and blasted directly into Leo's face. The banner unfurled overhead.

Happy Birthday!!!

And you—
Stopped.

Everything in you stopped. The grocery bag slipped from your hand and hit the floor. A bottle rolled away. Your face lost all color so quickly it was terrifying. Your pupils widened. Your breathing hitched once. Twice.

Raph knew fear. He knew panic. He knew the look of someone about to break. This was worse. This looked old. Like pain that had been waiting years for an excuse.

"Hey—" he started, stepping forward.

You stumbled backward. "No."

Your voice was barely sound. Mikey's smile dropped instantly. "Wait, no, it's okay—we just wanted—"

"No!"

The scream tore out of you raw enough to silence the room. You clutched your own arms so tightly your nails dug through fabric. Your eyes darted to the banner, the presents, the cake box on the counter. Then to all of them. Then nowhere.

Raph had seen people in danger before. But he had never seen someone look like kindness itself was hurting them.

"Please," you whispered, shaking now. "Please don't—"

Then you turned and ran. Straight back into the tunnel.

"Wait!" Mikey shouted.

Raph was already moving. He shoved past everyone, sprinting after you, the sound of your footsteps slamming through the sewer corridors ahead of him.

“Y/N!”

No answer. Just ragged breathing somewhere in the dark. He pushed harder. Behind him, he could hear the others starting to follow, but distant. Ahead, your steps faltered. Then a crash.

Raph rounded the corner hard enough to scrape the wall. You were on the ground near an old service ladder, knees pulled to your chest, hands over your ears, sobbing so violently you could barely breathe.

He stopped dead. Every instinct screamed run closer, fix it, do something. But you flinched the second he moved. So he stayed where he was. A few feet away. Huge hands hanging uselessly at his sides.

Your voice came in broken gasps. “I’m sorry— I’m sorry— I’m sorry—”

Raph’s chest tightened painfully. “Hey,” he said softly, softer than almost anyone had ever heard from him. “No. No, don’t do that.”

You cried harder. “I didn’t mean to ruin it—I didn’t know—I’m sorry—”

“You didn’t ruin nothin’.”

“Yes I did—”

“No.” The word came firm. He crouched slowly, lowering himself to your level. “You hear me?” he said. “You didn’t ruin anything.”

Your whole body shook. You wouldn’t look at him. The others arrived behind him but stopped when they saw you. No jokes. No movement. Even Leo was silent.

Raph glanced back once, and whatever was on his face made them stay exactly where they were. Then he looked at you again.

“Can you breathe with me?”

You didn’t answer. He inhaled loudly. Exhaled slowly. Again. Again. After a moment, your broken breaths tried to follow. Failed. Tried again. Raph stayed there through every stuttered inhale. Every trembling exhale. Every whispered apology. And as he watched tears hit the concrete, one truth settled cold and heavy in his gut:

This wasn’t about a surprise. This was about something that happened long before they met you. Something cruel enough to make a birthday banner look like a weapon.

Raph’s jaw clenched. Whoever did that to you—
He already hated them. And he hadn’t even heard the story yet.

The tunnel stayed quiet except for the sound of your breathing trying to steady itself. Slowly, shakily, you lowered your hands from your ears. Your eyes were red, unfocused, fixed on the damp concrete instead of anyone around you. You looked like someone who had run miles only to discover the thing chasing them had always lived inside their chest.

Raphael remained crouched a few feet away, broad shoulders lowered, hands open on his knees like he was trying to make himself look smaller. It was almost absurd, considering his size. But there was nothing threatening in him now.

Only concern. Behind him, Leonardo, Donatello, and Michelangelo stood back where he'd silently told them to stay. Nobody joked. Nobody pushed. Nobody said the wrong thing. For once, they all understood this was one of those moments that could be broken by a single careless word.

You wiped at your face with your sleeve and gave a miserable laugh that sounded nothing like laughter.

"Great," you muttered hoarsely. "Awesome. Super normal reaction."

Raph answered immediately. "Yeah? Well, we're mutants livin' in a sewer. Normal's overrated."

That got the tiniest breath of sound out of you. Not a laugh. But close. He took it and stayed gentle.

"You wanna sit somewhere else?" You shook your head. "You want them to leave?" You hesitated. Then shook your head again.

Mikey's eyes watered instantly. Leo elbowed him before he could dramatically sob.

You curled tighter into yourself. "I didn't mean to yell."

Mikey blurted, "You can yell at us whenever you need!"

Donnie pinched the bridge of his nose. "That is not the healthiest blanket policy, but sentiment acknowledged."

You looked embarrassed all over again. Raph cut in before you could apologize for breathing next.

"You don't owe us an apology every ten seconds."

Silence. Water dripped somewhere deeper in the tunnel. You stared at the floor for so long Raph thought maybe you wouldn't speak at all. Then, barely audible:

"My dad used to make birthdays good."

The sentence hit the space between all of them and stayed there. Your voice was thin, scraped raw.

"When I was little… he'd wake me up early and pretend the day was illegal." You swallowed. "Like birthdays were a secret holiday only cool people knew about."

Mikey's face crumpled. You kept talking, eyes never lifting.

“He’d make pancakes shaped like animals. They were always terrible.” A weak, involuntary smile flickered and vanished. “One year he made a horse that looked like a diseased potato.”

Leo quietly muttered, “Legend.”

No one told him to shut up because somehow it helped. You rubbed your palms against your sleeves.

“My mom would laugh at him. She always laughed at him.” Your expression twisted. “Then they stopped laughing.” No one moved. “They fought for years before the divorce. Quiet fighting at first. Then loud fighting. Then not speaking at all unless it was to hurt each other.”

Raph’s jaw tightened. You kept your voice strangely calm now, the way people do when discussing disasters they survived.

“I stayed with my mom mostly. Dad got weekends. Then less than weekends. Then whenever it was convenient.”

Donnie’s eyes narrowed behind his goggles.

“Statistically common,” he said quietly, then softer, “Still awful.”

You nodded once. “Mom got sick.”

That changed the air. Even Leo straightened.

“It happened fast,” you said. “Too fast. Everyone kept saying she was strong, and brave, and she’d beat it.” You laughed again, bitter and tiny. “People say things because they hate silence.”

Your fingers trembled. “She died three weeks before my birthday.”

Mikey covered his mouth. Raph didn’t realize he’d made fists until his nails pressed into his palms. You continued because once some doors open, everything behind them comes pouring out.

“My dad was wrecked for a while. Then not wrecked. Then suddenly there was someone new.” You said the last part like it tasted rotten. “Her name was Vanessa.” Even the name made you tense. “She was charming in public. Sweet voice. Perfect clothes. Always touching my dad’s arm like she was in a commercial.”

Leo muttered, “I already hate Vanessa.”

“Same,” Mikey whispered fiercely.

You barely seemed to hear them. “She moved in six months later.”

Raph’s nostrils flared. “That fast?”

You nodded.

“At first she just ignored me. Which was fine. Honestly, better than pretending. But after they got married…” You swallowed hard. “She started changing things.”

“What things?” Donnie asked carefully.

“Everything. Pictures of my mom disappeared. Her clothes got donated before I could stop it. The mugs she liked. The books she wrote notes in. Even the blanket she kept on the couch.” Your voice cracked. “She said it was time to move on.”

Raph’s shoulders went rigid. You finally looked up then, but only for a second. Eyes glassy. Ashamed of the pain.

“I started becoming… extra furniture.” No one interrupted. “Dad worked all the time. If I spoke, Vanessa answered for him. If I complained, I was dramatic. If I cried, I was manipulative. If I stayed quiet, I was sulking.”

Mikey whispered, “That’s evil.”

You shrugged like it no longer belonged to you. “Then my birthday came.”

Raph felt something cold crawl down his spine. You stared past him into nothing.

“First one after Mom died.” No one in that tunnel breathed. “Dad forgot until dinner.” Leo swore under his breath. “Vanessa remembered,” you said. Your lips trembled so violently you had to stop and press them together.

Raph’s voice dropped low. “You don’t gotta keep goin’ if you don’t want.”

“I do,” you whispered. “Because if I don’t say it, it keeps living like it’s bigger than me.”

That made all four brothers go still. You drew one shaky breath.

“She told me she had a present from my mom.”

Mikey made a small wounded sound.

“I thought…” You laughed once, broken. “I thought maybe she’d found something. A letter. Jewelry. Anything.”

Your eyes flooded again. “She gave me a box.”

Raph already hated where this was going so much he felt sick. You looked at your own hands.

“When I opened it…” Your voice vanished. Raph leaned forward unconsciously. Inside the silence, you whispered: “It was a severed pig’s head.”

Nobody moved. Nobody blinked. Even the sewer seemed to stop making noise. You kept speaking in the same numb tone.

“She’d paid a butcher to wrap it nicely. With ribbon.”

Mikey burst into tears instantly. Leo’s face had gone white-green under the markings. Donnie looked like his mind had simply stalled.

Raph—
Raph rose to his feet so suddenly everyone flinched. The tunnel wall cracked under one punch. Concrete dust rained down. He was breathing hard, chest heaving, fists shaking with rage so pure it barely fit inside him.

“You were a kid,” he said, voice rough and dangerous. “You were a kid.”

You startled, then shrank. He saw it and forced himself still immediately. Forced his voice down.

“Not at you,” he said quickly. “Never at you.”

He turned away, gripping the back of his neck, trying not to tear the tunnel apart stone by stone. You continued in a whisper.

“She laughed when I screamed. Dad came in, saw it, and…” Your eyes emptied. “He asked what happened to the carpet.”

Leo cursed loudly. Donnie muttered something in binary that was definitely obscene. Mikey cried harder. You wiped tears angrily.

“After that, every birthday felt like waiting for pain. Sometimes she’d ignore it completely. Sometimes she’d humiliate me in smaller ways. Burn the cake. Invite strangers. Give me cleaning supplies. Tell people embarrassing stories.”

Your shoulders hunched. “And even after she was gone—”

“Gone?” Leo asked.

“She left him years later. Took money. Cheated on him. Whatever.” You shrugged. “Didn’t matter. The damage stayed.” You looked toward the distant glow of the lair. “So when I saw the banner…” Your throat bobbed. “My brain just heard danger.”

Mikey walked forward slowly, eyes wet. “Can I hug you?”

You blinked. Then nodded once. He launched at you carefully, wrapping you in the gentlest hug possible. You stiffened for half a second. Then collapsed into it.

Leo came next, awkwardly patting your shoulder. “For the record, if I ever meet Vanessa, it’s on sight.”

Donnie adjusted his goggles. “I usually advocate lawful responses,” he said. “Today I am flexible.”

That almost made you smile. Raph still hadn’t turned around. You noticed.

“Raph?”

He faced you again. His eyes were wet. He looked furious about that too. He crossed the distance in three strides, then stopped like he was asking permission without words. You opened your arms.

That was all it took. He scooped you up effortlessly, holding you against his plastron like if he didn’t anchor you physically, the world might steal you again.

His voice came low beside your hair. “No more birthdays like that.”

You trembled. He held tighter. “No more people makin’ you feel small.” His jaw clenched. “No more pain owning that day.”

You buried your face against him and cried fresh tears. Not panicked this time. Just grief finally given somewhere safe to land.

—

The lair was quiet the next morning. Not dead quiet. Not tense quiet. Gentle quiet. The kind built carefully around someone who had spent too long living in noise.

You woke on the couch beneath three blankets, one weighted blanket, two mismatched pillows, and what appeared to be a folded pizza box being used as an improvised side table.

You blinked at the ceiling. For a moment, panic tried to rise. Tunnel. Tears. Banner. The story. Then memory followed after it.

Arms around you. Warmth. Voices that didn’t judge. A promise spoken against your hair.

You exhaled shakily and sat up. Something slid from your lap. A note. Messy handwriting. Orange marker.

GOOD MORNING BIRTHDAY HUMAN. DO NOT PANIC. NO ONE IS ALLOWED TO MAKE TODAY WEIRD. COME TO THE KITCHEN WHEN READY.

* Michelangelo
(P.S. I made pancakes and only burned one batch.)

You stared at it for a long moment. Then laughed softly despite yourself. Your throat still ached from crying. Your eyes felt swollen. But the laugh came easier than expected.

You padded toward the kitchen. The second you entered, four heads snapped your way. Leonardo was leaning against the counter pretending to be casual. Donatello was holding a tablet he clearly wasn’t reading. Mikey stood in an apron that said KISS THE CHEF, hands covered in flour. And Raphael was nearest the stove, arms crossed, trying to look normal and failing.

Nobody shouted surprise. Nobody jumped. Nobody even said the word birthday.

Mikey raised a spatula. “Morning. Pancake?”

You blinked again. “…That’s it?”

Leo nodded solemnly. “We had a team meeting. Aggressive cheerfulness has been banned.”

“Temporarily,” Donnie corrected.

“Pending review,” Leo agreed.

Something in your chest tightened. Because they had listened. They had actually listened.

You swallowed. “Yeah. Pancake sounds good.”

Mikey gasped like he’d been handed a medal and rushed to plate one. It was shaped vaguely like a turtle. Or a cloud. Or an injured starfish. You sat at the table while they moved around you in exaggerated normalcy.

Leo complained about losing sleep. Donnie complained about Leo complaining. Mikey narrated the syrup pour like a cooking show.
Raph silently placed a mug of tea beside you.

You looked up. “You remembered.”

He shrugged, eyes sliding away. “You always ask for tea after rough nights.”

That nearly broke you all over again. Instead, you wrapped both hands around the mug.

“Thank you.”

His face softened. “Yeah.”

Breakfast was strange in the best possible way. No pity. No walking on eggshells. Just warmth disguised as chaos.

Afterward, Donnie cleared his throat. “I have prepared a structured proposal.”

Leo groaned. “Why are you like this?”

Donnie tapped his tablet and a hologram appeared over the table titled: OPERATION: RECLAIM THE DAY

You stared. He continued in full presentation mode.

“Hypothesis: traumatic associations can be challenged by replacement experiences over time. Therefore, today we create new neural pathways connected to the date.”

Mikey whispered dramatically, “He means fun memories.”

“Yes,” Donnie said flatly. “I resent how efficiently you translated that.”

He swiped again.
Step One: User-Controlled Celebration
Step Two: Zero Forced Participation
Step Three: Immediate Termination If Distress Detected
Step Four: Cake

You couldn't help it. You laughed. A real laugh this time. The brothers visibly relaxed.

Leo pointed like he'd won something. "There it is."

Your smile faltered into something smaller, more vulnerable. "You guys really did all this?"

Mikey leaned on the table. "Duh."

Donnie adjusted his goggles. "Obviously."

Leo grinned. "Please. We are annoyingly invested."

Raph said nothing. He just looked at you with that steady expression of his that always felt like being seen too clearly.

Then:
"Only if you want it."

That mattered most. You looked down at your hands. All your life, birthdays had happened to you. Ignored. Weaponized. Ruined. Never yours.

Your voice came out quiet. "What if I don't know how?"

Raph answered first. "Then we figure it out with you."

Silence stretched. Then you inhaled.

"Okay."

Mikey screamed so loudly Donnie dropped the hologram. The day began carefully. No giant surprises. No crowds. No decorations shoved in your face. Instead, they let you choose everything.

You chose music first. Old songs your mother used to play while cleaning the kitchen. You braced for pain. But when the first melody filled the lair, something unexpected happened.

It hurt. And healed.

You stood still listening while memory rose like sunlight through dust. Your mother laughing. Spinning you badly around linoleum. Singing off-key. You covered your mouth. Raph moved beside you without speaking. His hand hovered once, then settled gently between your shoulder blades.

Grounding. You leaned into it.

Next, Mikey insisted on “birthday art therapy,” which was mostly finger painting on huge sheets of paper.

Leo cheated somehow. Donnie complained about texture contamination. You ended up with paint on your face, on your sleeves, and somehow in your hair. When Raph chuckled at the blue streak on your cheek, you froze.

He immediately looked worried. “What?”

“You laughed,” you said.

He frowned. “I laugh.”

“Not like that.”

“How do I laugh?”

You mimicked his short warm huff. Leo nearly fell over.

Raph groaned. “I hate all of you.”

But he was smiling. Later, Leo dragged everyone into games. Then Donnie let you help pilot a harmless training bot that absolutely rammed Leo into a wall. You laughed so hard you cried.

“Sabotage!” Leo yelled from the floor.

“Skill issue,” Donnie replied.

By evening, something had shifted. The date no longer felt like a trap. It felt… crowded. Filled. Alive. When the lights dimmed, your body tensed automatically. Raph noticed first.

He stepped closer. “You good?”

You nodded, though not convincingly. From the kitchen, Mikey emerged slowly carrying a cake. No candles. No singing. Just soft light and careful hands. White frosting. Uneven edges. Too many sprinkles.

You stared.

“There are no candles unless requested,” Donnie said.

“No song unless requested,” Leo added.

“No pressure,” Mikey whispered.

Raph looked down at you. “Your call.”

You approached the cake like it might bite. On top, written a little crookedly in icing:

YOUR DAY.

Your breath caught. “That’s it?” you whispered.

Mikey nodded nervously. “Too much?”

“No,” you said, voice breaking. “It’s… perfect.”

You touched the edge of the table to steady yourself. Then the tears came. Not violent like yesterday. Not shattered. Just full. You cried quietly while four turtles panicked in different styles. Mikey cried with you. Leo offered napkins like surrender flags. Donnie awkwardly presented a towel. Raph stepped in front of all of them.

He cupped your face gently in both hands. “Hey.” You looked up. “This ain’t a bad cry, right?”

You laughed through tears. “No.”

“Okay.”

His thumbs brushed under your eyes.

“Then let it happen.”

So you did. When you calmed, he moved aside. Knife waiting beside the cake. You hesitated. Then looked at all of them.

“Can… can we sing?”

All four froze. Mikey burst into fresh tears. Leo clutched his chest.

Donnie muttered, “Unexpected emotional counteroffensive.”

Raph’s expression softened into something almost unbearably tender. Then together, off-key and chaotic and sincere, they sang to you.

It was terrible. It was beautiful. You cried again halfway through. Then laughed again. Then cut the cake with shaking hands while everyone cheered like you’d slain a dragon.

Later, much later, when the others had drifted off and crumbs littered the table, you found Raph alone near the balcony edge of the lair. He was pretending to admire nothing.

You stepped beside him. “Hey.”

“Hey.”

You were quiet for a while. Then:

“I didn’t think I’d ever survive this day.”

He looked at you immediately. “You did more than survive.”

You swallowed. “I think… for the first time, it belongs to me.”

Raph's eyes warmed. "Yeah."

You leaned against his arm. "Thank you for chasing me."

He snorted softly. "Wasn't gonna let you run alone."

You turned and wrapped your arms around his middle. After one startled second, he held you back with crushing gentleness. Your voice muffled against his plastron.

"Can I ask one more birthday thing?"

"Anything."

You looked up. "Kiss me."

Raph went completely still. Then disastrously flustered. Behind you, from somewhere in the shadows:

Leo whisper-screamed, "I KNEW IT."

"Shut up!" Raph roared.

You laughed so hard you nearly doubled over. Then he bent down, one hand careful at your jaw, the other steady at your waist, and kissed you softly. No fireworks. No grand performance. Just warm and certain and real. When he pulled back, forehead resting lightly to yours, he murmured:

"Happy birthday."

And this time—
The words didn't hurt at all.

Chapter 21: “The Patting Incident” —ft . 2012 TMNT

The lair was louder than usual. Not dangerous loud. Not Kraang invasion loud. Just the kind of loud that happened when four mutant brothers were trapped underground too long with too much energy and too little patience.

“Leo, I’m telling you, that move would never work in real combat!”

“It’s called strategy, Raph. You wouldn’t understand because your strategy is punching first and thinking never.”

“That’s it—”

“Guys,” Donnie muttered without looking up from the tablet in his hands, “if you break another training dummy, I’m wiring the next one to shock you.”

From the couch, Mikey had somehow gotten popcorn from nowhere and was fully invested in the argument like it was live television.

“Ten bucks on Raph” he said.

“I’m standing right here” Leonardo snapped.

“Yeah, but emotionally you’re already losing.”

Then you laughed. Every head turned. It was unfair, really, how quickly the room changed when you entered it. The tension dissolved like smoke. Even Raph, who’d been one second away from tackling his older brother through a support beam, straightened instantly.

You stepped into the common room carrying a paper bag of snacks and drinks, smiling like you hadn’t just interrupted chaos. “Did I miss family therapy again?”

“Nope,” Mikey said. “You arrived just in time for round two.”

“You’re late,” Raph grumbled automatically. But there was no bite to it.

You looked at him. “Missed me?”

He crossed his arms. “No.”

“You looked grumpier than usual from the hallway.”

“That’s just his face,” Leo said. Raph lunged.

The room erupted again. You laughed harder, setting the bag on the table while Donnie immediately rifled through it with zero shame.

“Imported chips?” he gasped. “You understand me.”

“I understand snacks” you corrected.

From the far side of the room, a small scratching sound echoed near the terrarium.

Spike.

Raph’s pet turtle lifted his head from beneath a little ramp, blinking slowly before beginning his determined crawl toward you.

Mikey pointed dramatically. “Ooooh. She’s been chosen.”

“He probably smells the crackers” Donnie said.

“He always goes to you first” Leo added, narrowing his eyes.

You crouched down near the floor. “Hi, Spike.”

The turtle reached you with all the solemn purpose of a tiny armored king. You held out your hand, expecting him to sniff your fingers like usual. Instead, Spike rose slightly on his front legs. Then gently patted your cheek.

Once. Twice. Three times. Soft little taps with his front foot. And then he made a low churring noise from his throat.

The room went dead silent. You blinked. Spike patted your face again. Mikey’s popcorn bowl slipped from his hands and crashed to the floor. Leo stared like he’d witnessed an apocalypse. Donnie’s tablet slowly lowered. Raph froze so hard he may as well have turned to stone.

“…No way” Mikey whispered.

“No, no, no,” Donnie said, horrified and fascinated at once. “That is not happening.”

Leo pointed shakily. “That’s courting behavior.”

You looked over your shoulder. “What?”

“That,” Leo repeated, voice cracking slightly as Spike lovingly patted your jaw again, “is turtle courtship behavior.”

Mikey screamed. Raph’s face darkened from green to something bordering maroon.

“SPIKE!”

The turtle ignored him completely and continued churring at you, now trying to climb onto your knee.

You burst out laughing. “Oh my gosh. Is that what he’s doing?” You scratched gently beneath Spike’s chin. “My friend’s turtle does that to me too, haha.”

The brothers collectively recoiled.
“YOUR FRIEND’S TURTLE TOO?!” Mikey shouted.

“There are others?!” Donnie demanded. Leo looked deeply offended on behalf of biology itself.

Raph stomped forward, scooping Spike up with both hands. “Okay. Nope. We’re done here.”

Spike stretched his neck toward you in protest.

“Traitor” Raph muttered to him.

You were still laughing so hard you had to brace yourself on the couch. “It’s just a turtle thing!”

“Exactly!” Donnie said. “Do you know how statistically improbable this is?!”

“She’s collecting turtle husbands” Mikey said faintly.

“I am not.”

“You kinda are.”

Raph held Spike against his plastron, glaring at everyone. “Can you all shut up?”

That only made it worse. Because Raph never sounded that defensive unless something mattered. And you mattered.

Splinter entered at exactly the wrong—or perfect—moment. Master Splinter stepped calmly into the room with tea in one hand, taking in the scene: spilled popcorn, Donnie mid-panic, Mikey on the floor, Leo clutching his own head, Raph holding Spike like a kidnapped witness, and you wiping tears of laughter from your eyes.

He sipped once. “…Should I ask?”

“She stole Spike!” Mikey cried.

“I did not!”

“Spike is courting her,” Leo said gravely.

Splinter looked to the turtle, who immediately reached one tiny arm toward you. Then Splinter looked at Raph. Then at the way Raph couldn’t stop glaring at anyone who laughed.

A slow smile formed. “Ah,” Splinter said. “It seems we have discovered a turtle whisperer.”

You laughed again. The brothers did not. Splinter continued, voice smooth as silk. “How unfortunate for my sons. Even the smallest turtle recognizes what they cannot say.”

Four simultaneous protests exploded through the lair.

“Sensei!”
“Dad!”

“Come on!”
“That’s not what this is!”

You looked between them, confused but amused. “What are you all freaking out about?”

“No reason!” all four shouted.

You raised a brow. Raph looked like he wanted the earth to swallow him whole. Spike, from his arms, stretched once more toward you and churred.

Mikey pointed dramatically. “He’s stronger than all of us.”

Donnie nodded numbly. “He had the courage.”

Leo sighed into his hands.

Splinter took another sip of tea. “Perhaps one day, my sons will learn from Spike.”

You grinned. “Learn what?”

Splinter’s eyes gleamed. “How to approach someone they admire.”

Silence. Then absolute chaos. Mikey ran screaming laps around the couch. Donnie started denying things nobody had accused him of. Leo tried to restore order and failed instantly.

And Raph—
Raph stood in the middle of it all, holding Spike, staring at you as if he’d been hit directly in the chest.

Because while everyone else was panicking, you were smiling at him. Warm. Bright. Oblivious. And that was somehow worse than any monster they’d ever fought.

—

If there was one thing the brothers had learned, it was this: nothing involving Spike ever stayed normal for long.

First he had been Raph’s pet turtle. Then he had developed an unsettling attachment to you. Then there had been the mutagen incident. And now—

Now he was seven feet of muscle, spikes, claws, rage issues, and misplaced romantic confidence.

Slash stomped through the lair hallway hard enough to shake dust from the ceiling.

“I HAVE MADE A DECISION.”

Everyone in the common room froze. Leonardo slowly lowered the comic book he’d been pretending not to read. Donatello looked up from a half-disassembled drone. Michelangelo

stopped mid-bite with an entire slice of pizza folded into his mouth. And Raphael closed his eyes like a man sensing disaster before it arrived.

“No” Raph said immediately. Slash hadn’t even spoken further.

“No to what?” Mikey asked.

“To whatever he’s about to say.”

Slash marched into the room wearing a dented street sign across one shoulder and carrying something behind his shell. His expression was grave. Ceremonial. Dangerous.

“I REQUIRE ASSISTANCE.”

“Nope” Raph said.

“You don’t know what he needs help with,” Leo said.

“I do.”

“You do not.”

“I do.”

Slash glared at all of them. “I AM GOING TO ASK THE HUMAN FEMALE TO BECOME MY MATE.”

The room detonated. Mikey choked on pizza. Donnie dropped a wrench onto his foot. Leo stood so fast he flipped backward over the armchair. Raph simply made a sound no language had ever recorded.

“ABSOLUTELY NOT!” all four brothers yelled at once.

Slash blinked slowly. “Why?”

Why. Why.

Raph advanced first. “Because she’s not your mate!”

“I HAVE CHOSEN HER.”

“You don’t choose people like toppings!”

“I ALSO CHOSE TOPPINGS.” Slash considered this. “They pleased me.”

Leo stepped between them, trying for diplomacy and failing because he was already panicking. “Slash, relationships are more complicated than that.”

“I AM COMPLICATED.”

“That is not what I meant.”

Donnie pinched the bridge of his snout. “Where did you even get this idea?”

Slash proudly revealed what he’d been hiding. A twisted metal ring. Made, apparently, from a sewer pipe clamp and three bottle caps.

Mikey gasped. “He made jewelry.”

Raph looked ready to pass out.

“I OBSERVED HUMAN CUSTOMS,” Slash said. “ONE OFFERS A RING. THEN THERE IS KISSING. THEN A PARTY.”

Leo whispered, horrified, “He researched.”

Donnie was already typing furiously on his tablet. “I’m deleting the internet.”

“You are all jealous,” Slash concluded.

“We are not jealous!” Raph barked.

“Then why are you sweating?”

Raph looked down at himself, furious to find this true. At that exact moment, footsteps echoed from the tunnel entrance.

You.

“Hey! I brought—”

You stopped. The scene before you was impossible even by lair standards. Leo on top of a tipped chair. Donnie standing on the couch clutching a tablet. Mikey hiding behind a lamp. Raph nose-to-nose with Slash. And Slash holding what looked like scrapyard engagement jewelry.

“…Did I interrupt a cult meeting?”

“No!” all five shouted.

You set down the grocery bag slowly. “Okay.”

Slash immediately shoved the others aside with brute force and marched toward you. The brothers launched themselves after him.

“MOVE!” Raph snarled.

“OUT OF MY WAY!” Leo snapped.

“I REQUIRE SPACE FOR ROMANCE,” Slash boomed.

Mikey screamed, “THIS IS BETTER THAN TV!”

Donnie tackled Leo by accident. Raph crashed into all of them. You stared as four turtles and one mutant juggernaut became a rolling pile of limbs, shells, and outrage across the floor.

"…Should I come back later?"

"No!" Raph yelled from underneath someone's elbow.

Slash burst free from the heap and dropped to one knee so hard the concrete cracked.

He held up the ring. "HUMAN FEMALE."

You blinked. "Yes?"

"YOU ARE STRONG. YOU BRING SNACKS. YOU PAT MY HEAD WITHOUT FEAR."

The brothers scrambled upright in horror.

"Slash—" Leo warned.

"I WOULD LIKE TO CLAIM YOU."

Raph nearly died on the spot. Donnie made a strangled noise.

Mikey whispered, "Wow, he skipped every step."

You covered your mouth, half laughing, half stunned. "Claim me?"

"AS MY BELOVED."

"NOPE!" Raph lunged, grabbing Slash's arm and yanking it down. "Nope nope nope. Not happening."

Slash rose to full height, offended. "YOU SABOTAGE LOVE."

"I AM SAVING HER."

"FROM HAPPINESS?"

"FROM YOU!"

You burst into laughter. That made everyone pause. Because you weren't scared. You were trying not to cry laughing.

"Oh my god," you wheezed, "Slash, that is… weirdly sweet."

Raph snapped toward you. "Sweet?!"

"He made me a ring!"

"Out of plumbing!"

“It’s thoughtful.”

“It’s tetanus!”

Slash puffed proudly. “She understands me.”

“No she doesn’t” Raph growled.

“Maybe more than you.”

The lair went silent.

Even Mikey whispered, “Dang.”

Raph’s jaw clenched. Because under the absurdity, under the chaos, under the fact that Slash was an emotionally unstable mutant with no concept of boundaries—

There was one unbearable truth:

Slash had actually said something. He had stepped forward. He had taken the risk. While Raph had spent months grunting, glaring, and pretending he didn’t care.

You gently took the ring from Slash’s hand. All four brothers froze. You examined it solemnly. Then smiled.

“This is the ugliest thing anyone’s ever made me.” Slash beamed. “But,” you added, “I can’t marry you.”

Raph exhaled so hard he nearly collapsed.

Slash frowned. “Why?”

“Because I don’t want to be claimed.”

He considered this deeply. “…What if I asked politely?”

You laughed again. “Still no.”

He looked wounded for exactly two seconds. Then nodded.

“VERY WELL. I ACCEPT HONORABLE DEFEAT.”

Donnie whispered, amazed, “That worked?”

Slash pointed at Raph. “YOU, HOWEVER, ARE PATHETIC.”

Raph stiffened. “What?”

“YOU WANT HER MOST AND SAY NOTHING.”

Dead silence. Mikey slowly backed away. Leo covered his face. Donnie mouthed oh no. You turned to Raph. Raph turned the color of a fire alarm.

Slash folded his arms. “I FOUGHT FOR LOVE. YOU ONLY SCOWL.”

“I’ll kill you,” Raph said weakly.

“You will prove my point.”

You looked at Raph, amused and curious now. “Is that true?”

Raph opened his mouth. Nothing came out.

Slash shook his head in disgust. “COWARD.”

Then he stomped away dramatically, shoulders squared. “I SHALL GO BROOD ON A ROOFTOP.”

And just like that, he was gone. The room remained frozen. Then every brother turned to Raph.

Leo: “Well?”
Donnie: “Data suggests now is the moment.”
Mikey: “Shoot your shot, bro.”

You folded your arms, smiling softly. Raph stared at you like he’d rather fight a hundred Kraang than survive this conversation.

“…I hate all of you.”

You stepped closer. “Do you?”

He swallowed. Because you were right there. Still smiling. Still waiting. The lair had never been so quiet. Not truly quiet—pipes still rattled somewhere in the walls, distant water still rushed through old tunnels, machinery still hummed from Donnie’s lab—but compared to the chaos from five minutes ago, it felt almost sacred. Because everyone else had fled.

Well… “fled” was generous.

Mikey had loudly announced, “Wow! Look at the time! I suddenly need to reorganize my comic collection!”

Donnie claimed he had “urgent calibrations” despite holding no tools. Leo had muttered something about patrol schedules and then physically dragged Mikey out when he tried to hide behind the couch and watch. Even Master Splinter, who had appeared just in time to witness the fallout, simply gave Raph one long, unreadable look before saying:

“Some battles require courage of a different kind.”

Then he left too. Traitors.

So now it was only you and Raphael. Raph stood in the center of the room like someone awaiting execution. Arms crossed. Jaw tight. Eyes refusing to meet yours for more than half a second at a time.

You leaned casually against the couch.

“Well,” you said lightly, “this isn’t awkward at all.”

“It is for me.”

The honesty of it caught you off guard. He immediately looked annoyed with himself for saying it. You softened. Raph had always been loud when angry, blunt when irritated, aggressive when embarrassed—but when something mattered, really mattered, he became almost boyishly tense. Like every emotion in him jammed at once. And right now, he looked one wrong sentence away from combusting.

You took a slow step closer.

“So,” you said, trying not to smile too much, “about the turtle courtship thing…”

He groaned instantly. “Please don’t.”

“Oh, I’m definitely doing this.”

You circled him a little, hands behind your back. “Should I be worried?”

“Yeah.”

“Are you gonna pat my face?”

Raph nearly choked. “No!”

You raised a brow. “That sounded panicked.”

“Because you’re bein’ ridiculous.”

“You’re blushing.”

“I am not.”

“You absolutely are.”

He turned away, muttering something unintelligible.

You moved in front of him again. “Come on. Tell me the truth.”

“There is no truth.”

“Raph.”

He groaned louder, dragging both hands over his face. Then, to your surprise, he admitted it in one rough breath.

"…I thought about it."

You blinked. "What?"

He glared at the floor. "The stupid patting thing, okay? I thought about it." Your lips parted. Raph continued before courage could leave him. "After Spike did it. After everyone kept runnin' their mouths. I thought maybe if I…" He gestured angrily at nothing. "I dunno. Maybe if I did somethin' obvious for once, you'd get it."

You couldn't help it. You laughed. Not cruelly. Not mockingly. Just warm, startled laughter that spilled out because the image of fearsome Raphael secretly considering tiny turtle face pats was almost unbearably sweet.

His head snapped up. "See? This is why I never said nothin'!"

"No, no—Raph." You covered your mouth, still smiling. "I'm not laughing at you."

"Could've fooled me."

"I'm laughing because that is the most adorable thing I've ever heard."

He froze. Raph did not know what to do with words like adorable. He preferred words like dangerous. Strong. Tough. Those he understood.

You stepped closer again, gentler this time. "You really thought about doing it?"

He scowled, but weaker now. "…Maybe."

"How many times?"

"None."

"Raph."

"…More than once." Your smile deepened. He looked miserable. "I hate this conversation."

"No you don't."

"I really do."

"You hate being vulnerable."

"That too."

There it was. The real center of him. Raph wasn't scared of fights. He wasn't scared of pain. He wasn't scared of monsters, heights, explosions, blades, or blood. He was scared of offering something real and having it rejected.

You reached out slowly, giving him time to pull back. He didn't. Your fingers rested lightly against his arm. His muscles were tense as stone beneath your touch.

"You know," you said softly, "you could've just told me."

"Told you what?"

You tilted your head. "That you liked me."

He scoffed. "Yeah, real smooth. 'Hey, I'm a giant mutant turtle livin' in a sewer and I can't stop thinkin' about you.'"

"I would've managed."

"You say that now."

"I'm saying it now because it's true."

For once, Raph had no comeback. His eyes finally met yours fully. Raw, uncertain, guarded —and hopeful despite himself. You lifted your hand slowly toward his face.

Every instinct in him seemed to short-circuit. "…What're you doin'?"

"Courting behavior."

"Don't you dare."

Too late. You gently patted his cheek. Once. Twice. Three soft taps. Raph stared at you like the earth had shifted under his feet. Then he made the smallest, most offended noise. You laughed again, softer this time.

"There. Now we're even."

"You're impossible."

"And yet you like me."

He muttered, "Yeah."

It was so quiet you almost missed it. But you heard. And something in your chest warmed. So you rose onto your toes. He instinctively bent slightly toward you. And you pressed a gentle kiss to his cheek.

Everything in him stopped. No breath. No movement. No sarcasm. Just stunned stillness.

You drew back enough to see his expression—wide-eyed, speechless, completely disarmed. Then you smiled and tapped the ugly metal ring still sitting on the table where Slash had left it.

"I'll be waiting for yours."

You turned and started toward the tunnel exit before he could recover. Behind you came a strangled sound.

“Wha— wait, what?!”

You looked back over your shoulder. Raph was still rooted in place, one hand slowly rising to the cheek you kissed as if checking whether it had really happened.

“You heard me,” you said.

Then you walked off smiling. The silence lasted exactly three seconds. Then the lair exploded. Mikey burst from hiding behind the couch screaming. Leo dropped from the rafters where he had absolutely been spying.

Donnie ran in shouting, “I KNEW IT!”

Splinter’s voice drifted calmly from the hallway. “At last.”

Raph whirled on them in outrage. “YOU WERE ALL STILL HERE?!”

No one answered. Because all four were too busy laughing while Raphael, toughest of the Hamato clan, stood red-faced and shattered by one kiss and a promise of a ring.

Chapter 22: BODYGUARD —ft. rotTMNT Future Leo

Chapter Summary

[he’s forced to be your bodyguard in the Kraang invasion — SFW]

The sky had not been blue in years. Even during the day, New York lived under a permanent bruise-colored haze, split by the glow of Kraang towers and the red pulses of patrol drones cutting across ruined streets. Buildings leaned like broken teeth. Smoke curled from distant districts that no one bothered naming anymore.

Still, inside your family estate, the marble floors were polished. Generators hummed. Chandeliers glowed. Security doors sealed with hydraulic precision. Servants moved quietly through halls lined with old portraits of grim-faced ancestors who had built fortunes from steel, rail, and weapons long before the world ended. Your family had survived because they understood one thing better than anyone:

War always needed metal.

And your family owned foundries, hidden smelters, underground refineries, and enough stockpiled alloys to keep half the resistance armed for another decade. Donatello’s machines ran because of your family. The resistance’s barricades held because of your family.

And because your parents never gave charity, every shipment came with contracts, leverage, and demands. You were one of them.

“No.” Your father’s voice boomed across the breakfast hall.

You barely looked up from your coffee. “No?” you repeated. “Very eloquent.”

His jaw tightened. Even in apocalypse lighting, he looked expensive and angry. “You are not leaving this estate unescorted again.”

“I’m twenty-four.”

“You are reckless.”

“I’m bored.”

Your mother set down her fork with surgical calm. “You were found last week in the eastern market district.”

“I was buying records.”

“The market district was bombed two hours later.”

“So technically I left before it became dangerous.”

Your father pressed fingers to his temple. “You speak like consequences are decorative.”

You leaned back in your chair, unimpressed. “And you speak like I’m twelve.”

“You act sixteen.”

“Then maybe parent me better.”

The room went silent. Even the servants froze.

Your mother’s eyes sharpened. “Enough.”

You stood, pushing the chair back. “No, actually. I’m tired of being locked in here like some collectible vase while everyone else is out there doing something.”

“You are doing something,” your father snapped. “You are the heir to everything we built.”

“To a steel company in the apocalypse. Inspiring.”

“You are alive because of this company.”

You stepped closer to the long table. “No. I’m alive because mutants and scientists and actual fighters keep dying outside these walls while you negotiate invoice percentages.”

His face darkened.

Your mother spoke before he could explode. “You mistake emotion for wisdom.”

“And you mistake control for love.”

You turned and walked out before either of them could answer. Behind you, your father shouted your name. You kept walking. Because if you stayed another second, you would either scream or break something valuable.

Probably both.

—

The resistance headquarters was hidden beneath what used to be a transit station. Layers of reinforced steel, jury-rigged wiring, old subway tunnels converted into barracks and workshops. The moment you entered, heat hit you first. Then sparks.

Then Donatello yelling. “No, no, no—if that arm explodes again, I’m charging somebody emotionally!”

You smirked. The lab was chaos in motion. Half-built machines. Salvaged Kraang tech. Crates of metal stamped with your family crest stacked near the wall.

Donnie turned, goggles on forehead, grease on one cheek. “Oh good, the aristocracy has arrived.”

“You’re welcome for the titanium.”

“You overcharged me for the titanium.”

“You still bought it.”

He grumbled something deeply insulting in binary. Across the room, Michelangelo was painting symbols onto resistance shields with surprising concentration.

“Heyyy!” he called. “You brought snacks?”

“I brought myself.”

He sighed dramatically. “Worse than snacks, but still nice.”

Some things never changed. Then the room shifted. Not physically. Socially. People straightened. Voices lowered. Even Donnie glanced up. You turned.

Leonardo had entered.

Taller than the version from old stories. Broader. Scarred. One side of his plastron cracked and repaired with metal plating. His blue mask tails were frayed at the ends. He carried his ōdachi across his back and the weight of command like it had fused into his spine.

And yet—
That same cocky tilt of the mouth remained.

“Well, well,” he said, voice smooth with exhaustion buried underneath. “My favorite corporate sponsor.”

You crossed your arms. “You say that to everyone who funds you?”

“Nope. Only the hot ones.”

Donnie gagged loudly. “Please stop flirting in my workspace.”

Leo ignored him and walked closer. Up close, the damage was clearer. Fine scars near his jaw. Burn marks on one arm. The faint stiffness in his left leg he tried to hide. And those eyes. Still sharp. Still playful. But older now. Like they’d seen too much to fully rest.

“You weren’t supposed to come alone,” he said casually.

“I wasn’t alone.”

He glanced around. “Where’s your escort?”

“I lost them.”

“You ditched them.”

“I strategically misplaced them.”

He sighed toward the ceiling. “Fantastic.”

Your father’s voice suddenly echoed from the stairwell entrance. “There you are.”

You groaned. Your parents descended flanked by guards. Of course they had tracked you. Even resistance fighters looked uneasy when your father arrived. Money did that. Power did that. Your mother’s gaze flicked over the room with elegant disapproval.

Your father looked directly at Leonardo. “We need to discuss revised terms.”

Leo’s expression flattened instantly. “Those are my least favorite words in that order.”

Your father stepped forward. “My daughter continues to leave the estate against direct instruction. She places herself at risk, and therefore our operations at risk.”

“I place your blood pressure at risk,” you muttered.

He ignored you. “In exchange for continued priority shipments, we require additional security.”

Donnie muttered, “Here it comes.”

Your father pointed at Leonardo. “You.”

Leo blinked. “…Me?”

“You will serve as her personal bodyguard.”

The room erupted. Mikey laughed so hard he nearly fell off a crate.

Donnie shouted, “No! Absolutely not! I need him for missions!”

You stared. Leo stared harder. Then he pointed to himself.

“The leader of the resistance?”

“Yes.”

“The tactical commander of multiple sectors?”

“Yes.”

“The guy actively fighting an alien extinction event?”

“Yes.”

My father nodded once. “You.”

Leo slowly turned to you. Then grinned.

“Oh no,” you said immediately.

“Oh yes.”

He walked toward you, hands clasped behind his back like this was the best day of his life. “Princess gets a babysitter.”

“I’d rather be fed to the Kraang.”

“Cute. We can discuss that during our supervised walks.”

You looked at your father. “You cannot be serious.”

Your mother folded her hands. “If you insist on behaving like a reckless child, you will be treated accordingly.”

Leo leaned beside you and spoke low enough only you could hear. “Honestly? This is humiliating for both of us.”

“Then refuse.”

He smiled without looking at you. “Can’t.” You frowned. He glanced at the metal crates. “We need your family’s shipments.”

There it was. Not flirtation. Not humor.

Need.

The resistance was bleeding resources. Donnie’s machines needed alloy. Weapons needed repair. Safe zones needed barricades. People would die over pride. So Leonardo straightened, saluted mockingly toward your parents, and said:

“Leonardo Hamato, elite warrior, savior of civilization… now accepting babysitting duties.”

Mikey applauded. Donnie buried his face in his hands. You wanted to scream. Instead, you leaned toward Leo and whispered:

“If you enjoy this, I’ll make your life miserable.”

Without missing a beat, he whispered back: “Sweetheart, judging by your file, that was happening anyway.”

—

That night, your bedroom door slid open. You were halfway through climbing out the balcony window. Leo stood in the doorway, arms crossed.

“No.”

You froze with one leg outside. “How long were you standing there?”

“Long enough to admire the commitment.”

“Get out.”

“Counteroffer: get back inside.”

You rolled your eyes and continued climbing. In a blur, a portal flashed blue. Suddenly he was on the balcony railing beside you.

You yelped. “That is cheating!”

“That is skill.”

“You almost made me fall!”

He looked down at the fifty-foot drop. “Would’ve caught you.”

“Arrogant.”

“Correct.”

You tried squeezing past him. He blocked you effortlessly.

“You can’t stop me forever.”

“Nope,” he said lightly. “Just tonight.”

You glared. He met it calmly. For a moment the joking tone vanished.

“You know what’s out there after dark.”

You crossed your arms. “I know what’s in here.”

Something flickered in his expression. Understanding. That annoyed you more than if he’d argued.

He hopped down from the railing and stepped closer. “You wanna hate your parents? Valid.”

“I don’t need your permission.”

“You wanna feel trapped? Also valid.”

“Stop psychoanalyzing me.”

“But sneaking into a Kraang-controlled city to prove you’re miserable?” He shook his head. “That’s not rebellion. That’s self-destruction with style.”

You looked away. He softened his voice.

“You don’t have to like me. But I’m not letting you die because rich people are emotionally constipated.”

A laugh escaped you before you could stop it.

He smirked. “There she is.”

“I hate you.”

“Nah,” he said. “You hate that I’m right.”

You stepped back into the room. “Don’t get smug.”

“Too late.”

He closed the balcony doors and locked them. Then dragged a chair in front of them and sat down backward, arms folded over the backrest.

You stared. “What are you doing?”

“Guarding.”

“From the balcony?”

“From you.”

“You’re sleeping there?”

“I’ve slept in worse places.”

“You’re impossible.”

“And you,” he said, settling in with a grin, “are grounded.”

You threw a pillow at his face. He caught it one-handed.

Sleep was impossible. Not because of the distant explosions outside the estate walls. Not because of the ever-present mechanical hum of the security systems. Not even because somewhere in the city, the Kraang towers pulsed red against the night like open wounds.

No.

It was because Leonardo was sitting three meters away from your bed, in a chair he had dragged in front of your balcony doors like some smug gargoyle. Arms folded over the backrest. Head tilted down. Eyes closed. Looking entirely too comfortable for someone invading your room.

You turned onto your side. Then onto your back. Then your stomach. Then the other side. The sheets tangled around your legs. You huffed loudly. No reaction. You kicked the blanket off dramatically. Nothing. You groaned into your pillow. Still nothing.

You lifted your head. “Are you asleep?”

Leo answered instantly. “Nope.”

You glared. “Then stop breathing so loudly.”

“That’s just regular breathing.”

“It’s obnoxious.”

“Good to know.”

You dropped back onto the mattress with theatrical suffering. Five minutes later, you sat up again. “This is insane.”

“What is?”

“You being in my room.”

He opened one eye. “I’m not in your room.” He gestured vaguely around. “I’m in a chair.”

“You know what I mean.”

“Do I?”

You grabbed the nearest pillow and threw it. He caught it without effort and tucked it under one arm.

“Thanks. Lumbar support.”

“You’re the worst.”

“I’ve been called worse by better people.”

You got out of bed and paced. He watched silently now, eyes sharper than before. Even when relaxed, there was something alert in him. Like sleep had become a luxury his body forgot how to trust.

You hated noticing things like that. “I can’t sleep,” you muttered.

“That sounds like a you problem.”

“It’s a you problem because you’re here.”

“I’m here because you’re a flight risk.”

“I’m in pajamas.”

“You were halfway out a balcony window thirty minutes ago.”

“Technicality.”

He smirked faintly.

You stopped pacing and folded your arms. “Take me for a walk.”

“No.”

“You didn’t even think about it.”

“I did. Thought no very fast.”

You moved closer. “Come on.”

“No.”

“You’re my bodyguard.”

“Unfortunately.”

“That means if I want fresh air—”

“It means I stop you from doing stupid things.”

“It’s not stupid.”

“It’s after midnight during an alien occupation.”

You pointed triumphantly. “And I’d be with you.”

He blinked once. Then narrowed his eyes.
“That was manipulative.”

“Was it effective?”

“No.”

You crouched beside his chair dramatically. “Please.”

“No.”

“I’m trapped in here.”

“No.”

“I’m going insane.”

“Already happened.”

“I’ll be quiet the whole time.”

“That one was insulting.”

You put a hand over your heart. “You wound me.”

“Get back in bed.”

You sighed and stood, then walked away as if defeated. Three seconds later you spun around.

“I bet you’re scared.”

His expression went blank. “That was clumsy.”

“Scared you can’t protect me?”

He straightened slowly in the chair. “That was worse.”

“Scared you’ll trip over your old-man knee?”

There it was. A twitch at the corner of his mouth. Dangerous amusement.

“You really wanna play that game at this hour?”

You lifted your chin. “I think you talk big because you know I’m locked inside.”

He stood. The room suddenly felt smaller. Even scarred and tired, even carrying old injuries, he still moved like something built for combat. You refused to step back. He leaned down just enough for his face to be near yours.

“I have crossed collapsing skyscrapers, fought biomechanical nightmares, and survived my brothers’ cooking.” His voice dropped lower. “I am not afraid of taking you on a walk.”

“Then prove it.”

Silence. Then he exhaled through his nose.

“You are unbelievably annoying.”

“Is that a yes?”

“It is a deeply regretted yes.”

You grinned. He pointed at you.

“Coat. Shoes. Quietly. If your parents wake up, I’m leaving you to explain everything.”

—

Ten minutes later, you stood by the balcony doors bundled in dark clothes, trying not to look pleased. Leo opened the lock.

“You smile any wider, the cameras will catch it.”

“I’m not smiling.”

“You’re glowing like a cartoon.”

“You’re jealous because I won.”

“You didn’t win.”

He slid the doors open. Cold night air swept in.

“I chose the least exhausting option.”

You stepped onto the balcony. “And yet here we are.”

He climbed onto the railing first, balancing with irritating ease. The drop below vanished into landscaped darkness. You looked down once and regretted it.

“You expect me to jump?”

“No.”

Before you could ask what he meant, blue light flashed. A portal opened beneath your feet. You yelped as gravity shifted—and stumbled forward onto solid ground in a narrow alley beyond the estate walls. Leo dropped beside you a second later, closing the portal behind him.

You spun around. “That is cheating again.”

“That,” he said, adjusting his swords, “is efficient.” He looked up at the distant silhouette of your family mansion. “Also your security team is gonna have a rough morning.”

You laughed before you could stop yourself. And for a second, he smiled back without sarcasm. It changed his whole face. Then it was gone.

“Stay close.”

“You’re ruining the mood.”

“There was no mood.”

“There was a little mood.”

“Walk.”

—

The city at street level felt different than it did from your windows. Sharper. Colder. Alive in strange ways. Collapsed storefronts had become shelters. Rooftops were linked by cables. Resistance graffiti marked safe routes in fluorescent paint. Burned-out vehicles lined streets cracked open by roots and old explosions. Somewhere far away, Kraang sirens wailed.

You walked beside Leo through the sleeping ruins. He moved with practiced awareness, eyes scanning rooftops, shadows, intersections. Every few steps he listened. You noticed he

always positioned himself slightly between you and open streets.

“You do that automatically?” you asked.

“Do what?”

“Walk like everything wants to kill you.”

He shrugged. “Usually accurate.”

You were quiet for a moment. Then, softer:

“Does it ever stop?”

He didn’t answer immediately. “No.”

The honesty landed heavier than expected. He glanced sideways.

“You thought being leader meant confidence all the time?”

“I thought it meant certainty.”

He let out a short laugh. “Then somebody sold you propaganda.”

They turned down an avenue where skyscrapers leaned overhead like broken cliffs.

“You know,” he said, “when I was younger, I thought leadership meant always knowing what to do.”

“And now?”

“Now I know it means making decisions while terrified and pretending your hands aren’t shaking.”

You looked at him. “You get scared?”

“Constantly.”

“You don’t act like it.”

“That’s the trick.”

You stared ahead. “That sounds lonely.”

His steps slowed almost imperceptibly. “Yeah,” he said quietly. “Sometimes.”

For the first time since he had been assigned to you, you saw not the sarcastic bodyguard, not the commander, not the legend everyone depended on —just a tired man carrying too much.

It made your chest ache in a way you disliked. So naturally, you covered it with attitude.

“Well. Good thing you have me now.”

He barked a laugh. “There she is.”

“You’re welcome.”

“Truly blessed.”

—

They reached an overlook where a section of highway had collapsed, giving view to half the city. The Kraang tower glowed in the distance. Below, tiny resistance fires flickered in hidden streets. Wind tugged at your hair. You leaned on the cracked barrier.

“I used to think I’d leave all this,” you said.

“The city?”

“My family.”

He stood beside you. “And now?”

“Now there’s nowhere to go.”

“There’s always somewhere to go.”

You glanced at him. “Spoken like someone who can literally teleport.”

“Fair point.”

You smiled despite yourself. Then his posture changed. Instantly. Relaxed to lethal.

“What?” you whispered.

He held up one hand for silence. You listened. Metal scraping. Then the wet mechanical clicking of Kraang drones turning the corner below. Three of them. Scanning red lights cutting through the dark.

Your pulse spiked. Leo stepped in front of you. The joking warmth vanished like it had never existed. When he spoke, his voice was calm, cold, sharp.

“Get behind me.” And you did.

The drones rose from the street below with insect-like precision. Three Kraang scouts, all jagged metal limbs and glowing red optics, climbing the broken remains of the highway support with disturbing speed. Their bodies clicked and unfolded as they ascended, blades sliding out from beneath armored plating.

You stumbled back from the barrier. Leo didn’t move. He simply drew his sword. The sound of steel leaving the sheath cut through the night sharper than the wind.

“Stay behind me,” he said again.

This time there was no teasing in it. No dry humor. No playful arrogance. Just command. You obeyed before pride had time to argue.

The first drone launched itself over the ledge. Leo met it midair. One slash. The machine split in two, both halves crashing beside the roadway in a shower of sparks.

The second fired a burst of red energy.

He opened a portal with one hand, redirecting the blast behind it. The shot vanished into blue light and reappeared ten meters away, detonating into an abandoned billboard.

Then he moved. Fast. Too fast for the eye to follow cleanly. A blur of blue, steel, and controlled violence. His sword punched through the second drone’s core. He twisted, kicked it free, and sent the dead machine tumbling into the street below.

The third one adapted instantly. Its limbs unfolded wider, targeting you instead. You barely had time to gasp before it lunged past him. Leo turned—

Too late. The drone’s blade came for your throat. A blue flash tore open between you. Leo reappeared directly in front of you and took the strike across his shoulder. You heard the impact.

Metal against shell. Then flesh.

He grunted sharply. Your stomach dropped.

“Leo!”

He didn’t look back. He grabbed the drone’s arm with his free hand, snarled, and drove his sword upward through its faceplate. The machine convulsed, red lights flickering violently before collapsing at your feet.

Silence returned in pieces. Wind. Distant sirens. Your breathing. Leo remained standing for a moment, shoulders tense. Then he lowered the sword. Dark blood began running down his arm.

“Oh my God.” You rushed to him.

“It’s fine,” he said immediately.

“It is bleeding.”

“I’ve had worse.”

“You are bleeding a lot.”

“I’m dramatic by nature.”

“Sit down.”

He gave you an offended look. “You can’t order me around.”

“You literally got stabbed protecting me.”

“Technically sliced.”

“Sit.”

Something in your voice made him comply. He lowered himself onto a broken slab of concrete with a wince he tried to hide. You knelt in front of him, hands shaking more than you wanted. The wound cut through his shoulder and into the muscle beneath. Not fatal, but deep enough to matter.

You tore a strip from the inside lining of your coat.

He raised an eyebrow. “That was expensive.”

“Shut up.”

You pressed the fabric to the wound. He hissed through clenched teeth.

“Sorry.”

“Don’t apologize while causing pain. It confuses the branding.”

You glared, then tied the makeshift bandage tight. His face pinched briefly before smoothing out again.

“You don’t always have to joke,” you said quietly.

He looked at you for a long second.

“Yes,” he said. “I do.”

The answer hit harder than you expected. Because now you understood. The jokes weren’t carelessness. They were armor. If he stopped joking, he might have to feel everything.

You sat back on your heels. “You could have died.”

He glanced at the ruined drones. “So could you.”

“That’s not the point.”

“It’s exactly the point.” His voice stayed calm, but something raw edged beneath it. “You think I wanted this assignment because it was funny?”

“You seemed thrilled to annoy me.”

“I was.” A faint smile tugged at his mouth, then faded. “But I also knew if you kept sneaking out alone, eventually something would find you before I did.”

You looked down. The city lights blurred for a moment.

“I hate being trapped,” you whispered.

“I know.”

“I hate them deciding everything for me.”

“I know.”

“I hate feeling useless while everyone else suffers.”

This time he didn’t answer right away. Then:

“You’re not useless.”

You laughed bitterly. “I sell metal through my parents.”

“You keep our people equipped.”

“That’s my family’s money.”

“You think resources appear by magic?” He leaned forward slightly. “Wars are won by fighters, sure. They’re also won by engineers, medics, suppliers, smugglers, mechanics, people who keep lights on and walls standing.” He held your gaze. “You matter more than you think.”

No one had said something like that to you in years. Not without wanting something in return.

Your throat tightened. “You’re very annoying when you’re wise.”

“I contain multitudes.” You snorted despite yourself. He stood carefully. “Come on.”

“You’re injured.”

“And you’re grounded. We both carry burdens.”

—

The walk back was slower. You stayed close without being told. Once, when rubble shifted under your shoe, your hand caught his forearm automatically. He steadied you without comment. Neither of you let go immediately.

By the time the estate walls rose ahead of you, dawn had begun staining the clouds pale gray. He portaled you both back onto the balcony. The room was exactly as you’d left it. Except now it felt different. Real somehow.

Leo closed the doors softly behind you.
“You should sleep,” he said.

“You should get that shoulder treated.”

“I know a guy.”

“You are the guy.”

“Then I’m doomed.”

You hesitated. Then stepped closer.

“Leo.”

“Yeah?”

“Thank you.”

He blinked once, like the words surprised him more than the drones had. Then he gave a small shrug.

“Part of the service package.”

“I’m serious.”

His expression gentled. “I know.”

You looked toward the bedroom door, then back at him. “My parents are still impossible.”

“Undoubtedly.”

“I’m still angry.”

“Reasonable.”

“I’m still probably going to sneak out again someday.”

He sighed deeply. “I knew peace was temporary.”

“But…” You glanced at the blood on his bandage. “Maybe next time I’ll ask first.”

He stared at you. Then placed one hand dramatically over his chest.

“Growth. I’m witnessing growth.”

“Don’t ruin it.”

“Too late.”

You smiled. A real one this time. He noticed. And for once, he didn't joke. He just smiled back—small, tired, genuine. Then he dragged the chair back in front of the balcony doors and sat down with a groan. You climbed into bed. The city still burned outside. The war still waited. Your parents would still be unbearable in a few hours. Nothing essential had changed. And yet, as sleep finally pulled at your eyes, you felt something unfamiliar settle in the room.

Safety.

You looked over once more. Leonardo sat watch at the balcony, sword within reach, eyes half-lidded but alert. When he noticed you staring, he murmured:

"Go to sleep, princess."

You closed your eyes. And for the first time in a long time…you did.

Chapter 23: Bayverse Leonardo X Fem. Reader [NSFW]

Chapter Summary

[read this under your own responsibility — both characters are aged up]

“They won’t hear us.”

“You literally live in the damn sewers, they WILL hear us.” you whisper loudly, only to get your mouth covered by his between laughs.

A minute earlier, you two were wrestling-playing in his bed. Of course it was your idea, and of course you got mad when you noticed he was going very easily on you.

You complained about it, and he looked at you like if he was offended by the fact you were grumpy about him being gentle at you.

Right now, you ended up with your back against the mattress and him in top of you, although that protectiveness didn’t leave and he was making sure not to crush you beneath him.

“Okay no, that’s not a way to shut me up.” you reply, though you wrap your arms around his neck and look up at him. “Come on, your brothers might be too busy in their own worlds but they literally could hear us.”

Leonardo chuckles, a low rumble against your lips. "Let them hear." He trails kisses down your neck, teeth nipping softly. "All they’ll hear is me making you scream my name."

His hands slide up your thighs, fingers digging in just enough to make you gasp. "Unless... you’d rather I keep you quiet?"

“And you are okay with your brothers hearing that? You? Leonardo Hamato?” you start mocking him, playfully.

A wicked grin spreads across his face, his voice dropping to a husky whisper.

"Oh, I'm more than okay with it. Let them hear how good you sound when I'm inside you." His hands move to grip your hips, pulling you flush against him. "Maybe they'll finally get a clue and learn to knock."

You look up at him and bite your bottom lip, the smile still on your lips. “Woah, you really are that needy, huh?”

"Needy?" Leonardo's laugh is rough, his eyes darkening as he presses his hips against yours. "Only for you."

He captures your bottom lip between his teeth, tugging gently before releasing it with a soft pop. "Every damn day. Now stop asking questions and let me show you just how much."

“Okay.” You smile wider and get comfortable on the mattress, looking up at him as you keep biting your lower lip. “Show me then.”

A growl rumbles in his chest, low and possessive, as his eyes darken with raw need.

"Your wish is my command."

He leans down, his lips crashing against yours in a bruising kiss that steals the breath from your lungs. His hands slide up your thighs, bunching your skirt around your hips as he grinds against you, the friction making you whimper into his mouth.

"Just relax," he murmurs against your lips, his voice rough and thick with desire. "Let me take care of you."

He wastes no time, his hands sliding beneath your shirt to trace the heated skin of your stomach, making you arch into his touch. His lips leave yours to trail a path of fire down your neck, his teeth grazing your pulse point.

"You're so responsive," he murmurs against your skin, his voice a low growl. "Just like I knew you'd be." He nips at the sensitive spot beneath your ear, his fingers finding the clasp of your bra, his movements sure and confident.

The clasp gives way with a soft click. His hands move swiftly, pushing the straps down your arms, his eyes never leaving yours as the cool air hits your skin. A low, appreciative sound escapes his lips as he takes in the sight of you bared for him.

"Beautiful," he breathes, his thumbs brushing over your nipples, hardening them into tight peaks. He leans down, his mouth closing around one, his tongue swirling in a slow, deliberate circle that makes you gasp and arch your back.

“Oh fuck..~” you sigh, placing your hand on his shoulder.

He smirks against your skin, the vibrations sending a fresh jolt through you.

"That's the idea," he murmurs, his voice a low rumble against your chest.

He continues his exquisite torment, his other hand slipping lower, fingers tracing the hem of your skirt before sliding beneath the fabric, his touch burning a path up your inner thigh. He takes his time, building the tension until you're trembling and needy, waiting for his next move.

His fingers find the slick heat of you, a low groan escaping his lips as he feels how ready you are.

"All for me," he rasps, his voice thick with satisfaction. He teases you for a moment, drawing slow, maddening circles that have you squirming beneath him before finally sliding one deep

inside. He watches your face intently, savoring the way your eyes flutter closed and your breath hitches.

"You feel so good," he murmurs, his thumb finding that perfect spot and starting a rhythm that makes your whole body arch into his touch.

The rhythm of his hand becomes relentless, his fingers working inside you while his thumb presses down, deep and unyielding.

He leans over you, his breath hot against your ear as he whispers: "That's it. Let go for me."

The pressure builds, a tight coil of fire winding tighter in your gut until finally, it snaps. A cry tears from your throat as you shatter around his hand, your body clenching in wave after wave of pleasure. He doesn't stop, drawing out every last tremor until you're left boneless and gasping.

“Leo-“ you arch your back, gripping his forearm.

He doesn't let up, his fingers still moving inside you, milking every last tremor.

"Shhh, I've got you," he murmurs, his voice a low, soothing hum against your ear. He pulls his mouth from your skin and captures yours in a deep, possessive kiss. His other hand slides into your hair, holding you close as he swallows your soft cries.

"Tell me what you need," he breathes against your lips, his own ragged with want. "Anything. I'll give you anything."

“I need you” you whisper against his lips, in a desperate tone.

A growl rumbles in his chest, vibrating through you.

"You have me," he rasps, his hands moving to yank his own belt open with a rough flick of his wrist. His eyes are dark, locked on yours, full of a fierce, wild need. "Now."

He shoves his pants down just enough, his thick cock springing free. He lifts your hips, positioning himself at your entrance, the thick tip sliding through your slick folds.

"Take me," he demands, his voice a raw command as he slowly, relentlessly pushes inside.

You let out a loud groan as he pushes himself inside, nailing your nails on his forearm as you close your eyes.

He grunts, the sound torn from deep in his chest as he feels your tight heat clench around him. He pauses for a second, his own eyes closing to savor the feeling of you taking him in.

"Yeah," he breathes, a dark smirk playing on his lips. "Let me hear you."

Then he draws back and thrusts again, harder this time, setting a deep, punishing rhythm that has the old mattress groaning in protest beneath you.

He sets a brutal pace, his hips snapping against yours with a force that makes the sludge beneath the mattress ripple and slosh. The sound of his skin slapping against yours is obscene, echoing off the sewer walls, a filthy counterpoint to your helpless moans and his grunts.

He leans down, his weight pinning you, his hand coming up to fist your hair, yanking your head back so he can claim your mouth in a bruising kiss, swallowing the desperate little sounds you make.

He pulls back from the kiss, a string of saliva connecting your mouths for a moment before it breaks. His eyes are blazing, locked onto yours, watching every flicker of pleasure and pain that crosses your face.

His pace becomes more frantic, less controlled, a deep, rhythmic slap of flesh on flesh punctuated by the wet, needy sounds of your bodies joined together.

"That's it," he rasps, his voice thick. "Just like that. All for me."

You look up at him, moans escaping your mouth.

A low, guttural sound rumbles in his chest, vibrating against you. He seems to feed off the sight of you lost in sensation. His hand slips from your hair, tracing the line of your jaw with a surprising tenderness that clashes violently with the raw, powerful thrusts of his hips.

"Look at you," he murmurs, his voice a gravelly caress. All mine. "Yeah? You feel that?" He drives into you harder, a deliberate, punishing angle aimed at drawing more of those beautiful sounds from your throat.

The rhythmic slap of skin on skin fills the air, punctuated by your gasps and his low growl. His grip tightens on your hips, fingers digging in, pulling you back onto him with each downward stroke. He leans forward, his hot breath ghosting over your ear as he quickens his pace, each thrust hitting deeper, rougher.

"You like that," he rasps, more a statement than a question, a command. He watches your face, your mouth hanging open in a silent scream, a cruel smirk playing on his lips. "Scream for me. Let them hear."

His words land like a physical blow, a dark promise that ignites something in your gut. He’s watching you, reading every flicker of your expression, gauging your reaction. His grip on your hips tightens almost painfully, his fingers sinking into the soft flesh.

He leans back, pulling his cock almost all the way out, the thick head catching before he slams home again, a deeper, more brutal angle that makes you cry out. He smirks at the sound, a predator enjoying the reaction of his prey.

"Yeah. That's the sound," he breathes, his voice raw. "Louder."

A choked cry tears from your throat as his thrusts grow punishing, each one a deep, resonant impact that radiates through your entire being. He seems to thrive on the sound, his hips

snapping forward with renewed force. His massive hand moves from your hip, sliding up to grip your neck, his thumb pressing into the soft curve of your jaw.

He forces your gaze to meet his, his own eyes burning with an intense, possessive fire.

"That's it," he growls, the sound a low, gravelly rumble. "Let me hear you." He buries himself to the hilt, holding you there, pulsing inside you, feeling you tighten around him in a way that makes his breath hitch.

The pressure on your jaw tightens, not to restrict, but to ground you, to hold your gaze captive as his body drives into yours. Each slow, deliberate grind sends a wave of pleasure so intense it borders on pain.

His other hand snakes between your bodies, his thumb finding that most sensitive spot with unerring accuracy. He presses, circling with a rhythm that steals the breath from your lungs and melts your bones into a pliant surrender.

"Mmm, such a good girl for me," he murmurs, his voice a dark velvet caress against your ear. "Just take it all. All of it."

His thumb works relentless circles, a counterpoint to the deep, grinding pressure of his hips. The world narrows to the slick, wet sounds of your joining and the ragged gasps tearing from your throat.

His hand leaves your throat to slide up your side, his rough, calloused palm tracing the curve of your breast before he closes his fist around your hair again, pulling your head back.

He scrapes his teeth against the pulse hammering in your neck, a possessive bite that sends a jolt straight to your core. "Come for me. Now."

His command is the final, sharp crack of a whip. A tidal wave of heat crashes through you, starting in your core and detonating outward. You arch against him, a sharp cry ripped from your throat as your body convulses around his.

He growls, a deep, satisfied sound, feeling the fluttering clench of your release milking him. He doesn't stop; his thrusts become sharper, more demanding, chasing his own finish.

He buries his face in the crook of your neck, his hot breath ragged against your skin as his powerful body shudders with the force of his own climax, his grip on you like bands of unyielding steel.

For a long moment, the only sound in the damp sewer air is your combined, ragged breathing. His weight presses you into the mattress, a warm, solid promise.

Then, with a groan that vibrates through his chest, he slowly, carefully, withdraws. Leaving you feeling strangely hollow and slick. He shifts, reaching off the side of the makeshift bed to grab a discarded, soft rag that was already damp with cool water.

He gently begins to clean you, his touch impossibly tender now, a stark contrast to the voracity only moments ago.

"Just relax," he murmurs, his voice rough. "Let me."

You look up at him, shyly. “You don’t need to-“

He silences you with a single, firm finger pressed to your lips. His eyes are dark, soft, but leave no room for argument.

"I want to," he says simply, his gaze holding yours. He continues his ministrations, the cool cloth a stark, cleansing contrast to the heat of your skin. His touch is methodical, patient, a stark contrast to his earlier ferocity.

He finishes, dropping the rag onto the floor, and his arms wrap around you, pulling you into a tight, possessive embrace. His chin rests on the top of your head, his body a warm, solid shield against the damp chill of the sewer.

"Better?"

You bury his face in the crook of his neck, nodding. “Yeah…that was…woah”

A low rumble of amusement vibrates through his chest, right against your cheek.
"Just 'woah'?" He tightens his arms around you, his chin gently tilting your head up so he can look into your eyes. A slow, smug smile spreads across his face.

"I can do better than 'woah'." His thumb strokes a slow circle on your back. "Much better."

He leans in, his breath a warm ghost on your lips, and captures them in a kiss that’s deep and lazy and full of the same lazy satisfaction as the soft, sticky air around them.

“Show me another day?” you whisper tiredly, speaking between the kiss.

His lips part from yours with a soft, wet sound. He rests his forehead against yours, his breath warm and steady.

"Every day," he promises, the word a low murmur against your mouth. His hand comes up to stroke your cheek, his thumb tracing the line of your jaw. He shifts, pulling you even closer until there's no space left between your bodies, just the warmth and the soft slickness of your skin against his.

"For the rest of forever," he adds, his voice dropping to a husky whisper meant only for you.

Chapter 24: ARRANGED MARRIAGE —ft. rotTMNT Future Donatello

Chapter Summary

> [you two are forced to marry each other in order to please the alliance between your family and the resistance —though you hate each other]

The city had forgotten what sunlight looked like. New York, once loud and bright and vulgar with life, now lived beneath a sky bruised purple by the Kraang dimension. Towers leaned like broken teeth. Streets were stitched with alien biomass and old scorch marks. Sirens no longer meant rescue. They meant something had found you.

And yet, somehow, people still held parties. Not joyful ones. Never joyful. Strategic ones.

Tonight's gathering took place inside the reinforced remains of what had once been a luxury hotel in Midtown, now converted into a fortress of polished stone, steel barricades, and desperate wealth. Chandeliers still hung overhead, though half their crystals were missing. Candlelight replaced electricity in many corners, making the grand ballroom glow like the inside of a tomb.

Resistance leaders stood beside merchants. Smugglers beside former senators. Everyone pretending they were still civilized.

And at the center of it all—you.

Dressed in silk that cost more than some families ate in a year. Hair pinned too tightly. Jewels at your throat like shackles. Your family had survived the apocalypse better than most. While others lost homes, your parents had turned storage vaults into supply chains, turned scarcity into leverage, turned fear into power. They fed neighborhoods, yes—but never for free.

Now they wanted something greater than money. Protection. Political permanence. A symbol.

You.

"You will smile," your mother had said while fastening your earrings. "You will not embarrass us."

"I'd rather be fed to the Kraang."

"You're being dramatic."

"No," you'd replied. "I'm being optimistic."

Now you stood near the head table, fingers curled around a champagne glass filled with water, staring across the ballroom at the man who was about to become your husband.

Donatello.

Even from across the room, he looked dangerous. Donnie was taller now. Broader too, though still lean in that wiry, sharp-edged way. His shell was scarred. One side of his face cut by an old mark that disappeared beneath the purple glow of his visor. His tech harness hummed quietly with restrained weaponry.

He stood with the unnatural stillness of someone who had spent too long in war. People gave him space without realizing they were doing it. And he was glaring directly at you. You lifted your glass in mock salute. He looked away like he'd smelled something rotten.

Good. Hatred, at least, was honest.

The alliance had been announced three days ago. The Hamato resistance needed resources: medicine, batteries, food transport, access tunnels, labor. Your family needed military backing, legitimacy among the people, and a guarantee that if they backed the resistance publicly, they wouldn't be assassinated by rival factions next week.

So the old men and women around the table had done what old men and women always did. They traded younger people's lives. Marriage would symbolize unity. Wealth and rebellion hand in hand. Stability. Hope.

You called it extortion with flowers.

Donnie had called it—very loudly, according to rumor—"a catastrophically idiotic sociopolitical maneuver designed by emotionally constipated fossils."

That had almost made you like him. Almost.

Then you met him. The first meeting had lasted four minutes before turning into a verbal knife fight.

"You're late," you'd said.

"I was considering not coming."

"You should've followed through."

"I say the same every time I hear your family speak."

Since then, every interaction had been worse. You thought him arrogant, controlling, impossible. He thought you spoiled, manipulative, and emblematic of everything wrong with pre-invasion elites. Neither of you were entirely wrong.

A spoon clinked sharply against crystal. The room hushed. Your father rose first, smiling with all the warmth of a banker foreclosing a home.

“Friends, allies, survivors… tonight marks a historic union.”

You nearly gagged. He continued speaking about sacrifice, unity, legacy. Words polished smooth by use. Beside him, one of the resistance generals nodded solemnly.

Then Donnie’s brothers entered from the side corridor. Leonardo strode first, scarred and regal despite the exhaustion around his eyes. Raphael followed like a mountain given anger and form. Michelangelo came last, quieter than the stories ever described, mystic energy faintly sparkling.

And then Donnie moved to stand beside you.

The room straightened. He smelled faintly of machine oil, smoke, and rain. You didn’t look at him.

“Try not to scowl,” you muttered.

“Try not to speak.”

“Already failing as a husband.”

“We are not married yet.”

“Counting the seconds?”

“Yes,” he said flatly. “Until I can classify this as a tactical mistake and leave.”

You smiled without warmth. “Sweet.”

The officiant—a former judge now repurposed for wartime ceremonies—cleared his throat.

“We gather under extraordinary circumstances—”

“Do we have to?” Donnie interrupted.

A dozen people froze. Leonardo pinched the bridge of his nose.

“Donnie” Raph rumbled.

“What?” Donnie said. “I’m requesting efficiency.”

You turned your head, finally looking at him fully. Up close, the damage war had done to him was harder to ignore. And behind the sarcasm—

Rage.

Not at you alone. At all of it. At being cornered. At surviving long enough to be sold.

For one strange second, sympathy flickered. Then he noticed you studying him.

“What are you staring at?”

“Trying to locate your redeeming features.”

“Use a microscope.”

The officiant, sweating now, continued. Vows were shortened. No poetry. No religion. Just legal declarations and mutual obligation. When it came time to exchange bands, a servant approached with two rings forged from reclaimed titanium and gold.

You took yours. Donnie did not move. The room held its breath.

“Donatello,” Leonardo said quietly.

“I am aware of my name.”

“Then act like it.”

His jaw flexed. Slowly, with visible disgust, he took the ring and slid it onto your finger. Cold metal kissed skin. You did the same to him, pressing harder than necessary.

“Ow,” he said.

“That was an accident.”

“You’re a terrible liar.”

“You’re observant. Congratulations.”

The officiant swallowed. “By the authority vested in me by the provisional civil council… I declare you married.”

Silence. Then applause. Thin, relieved, transactional applause. You wanted to scream. Instead, you stood there beside the man who despised you while strangers celebrated your captivity.

“Tradition calls for a kiss,” someone shouted from the crowd.

Several others laughed nervously.

Donnie’s face went blank in the dangerous way storms sometimes go still. “No,” he said.

Your mother hissed under her breath.

You smiled sweetly at the crowd. “He’s shy.”

“I will vaporize you,” he murmured.

“You’d ruin the photos.”

Leonardo stepped in smoothly. “Given current sanitary conditions and wartime concerns, we’ll waive that custom.”

Scattered laughter again. Music began. Servers moved. Politics resumed instantly. The wedding was over. The alliance had begun. And you were trapped.

You stepped away from Donnie at once, heading toward the balcony doors for air, but a hand caught your wrist. Not hard. Firm.

You turned sharply.

His face inches from yours.

“Listen carefully,” he said, voice low enough only you could hear. “Whatever fantasy you have about domestic leverage, erase it. I will fulfill the legal minimums of this arrangement. Public appearances. Strategic cooperation. Nothing else.”

You yanked your wrist free. “Good,” you snapped. “Because the idea of sharing oxygen with you is already intolerable.”

“Excellent. Our first mutual interest.”

“You think you’re the prisoner here?” you said, stepping closer. “You at least get to keep your cause. Your brothers. Your mission. I was handed over like inventory.”

For the first time, he hesitated. Just a beat. Then his expression hardened again.

“And yet,” he said quietly, “your family still profits.”

That landed because it was cruel—and partly true. You slapped him. The crack echoed louder than the orchestra. Every nearby conversation died. Donnie’s head turned with the strike. Slowly, he looked back at you.

The ballroom stared.

Raph muttered, “Oh no.”

Mikey covered his face. Leonardo already looked tired enough to age another decade.

You realized what you’d done only when your own palm began to sting. Donnie straightened to full height. Then, with terrifying calm, he leaned close enough that only you heard him.

“If not for the alliance,” he said, “I would have said something unforgivable.”

He turned and walked away into the crowd. Leaving you alone under a hundred eyes.

…

By the next morning, the wedding already felt like a bad rumor everyone was politely pretending had not happened. Except the ring remained on your finger.

Cold. Heavy. Real.

You sat in the breakfast room of your family's secured penthouse fortress, untouched tea cooling beside you while your parents dissected the previous night like investors reviewing quarterly numbers.

"Striking him publicly was childish" your father said, slicing fruit with surgical calm.

"Refusing the kiss publicly was also childish," you replied.

"He is a soldier," your mother said. "They are temperamental."

"He is insufferable."

"And now," she said coolly, "he is your husband."

You pushed your chair back an inch too hard. "Do not start."

"No," she said, dabbing her mouth. "You will listen. The resistance council is already uneasy. If this alliance fractures because the two of you behave like feuding adolescents, people die. Supply routes close. Security contracts collapse. Neighborhoods go hungry." She leaned forward. "You will apologize."

You laughed once. Short and bitter. "You sold me and now I'm expected to be gracious too?"

Your father didn't even blink. "You are expected to be useful."

There it was. Not daughter. Not person.

Asset.

You stood abruptly, chair scraping stone. "Send one of the servants if you want manners performed."

"You will go yourself," your mother said. "Today."

You left before rage made you say something that could not be unsaid. But anger had a strange habit of cooling into thought. Because once you were alone, another truth crept in—the look on Donnie's face after you slapped him.

Not fury. Not humiliation. Exhaustion. Like it had simply been one more blow in a life made of them.

You hated that the memory bothered you. You hated more that maybe you had been unfair. So by late afternoon, against your better judgment and perhaps your own pride, you crossed sectors of ruined Manhattan under escort and made your way toward the resistance's engineering stronghold.

People moved differently there. No perfume, no polished shoes, no curated smiles. They carried tools, ammo, bandages, crates. Children ran messages. Medics argued over supplies. Mechanics slept sitting upright beside generators. Everything smelled like sweat, metal, smoke, and purpose.

You felt overdressed in every sense.

One of the guards recognized the ring and stiffened. “Ma’am.”

“Don’t call me that.”

He looked confused. “…Right.”

“Where is Donatello?”

The guard glanced down the corridor as if considering whether warning you counted as treason. “Lab level. Last door. If something explodes, duck.”

You almost smiled.

Almost.

The lower levels of the base vibrated with machinery. Pipes hissed overhead. Emergency lights painted the halls in red pulses. By the time you reached the final reinforced door, you could hear movement inside—tools clattering, mechanical arms shifting, the rapid clicking of keys.

The door stood half-open. You paused at the threshold. The room beyond was vast and chaotic in a way only genius or madness could justify. Tables buried beneath schematics. Dismantled Kraang tech laid open like corpses in surgery. Screens covered in equations. Half-built drones hanging from ceiling rails. Spare limbs, batteries, weapon cores, wire nests, scorch marks.

And at the center of it—

Donnie.

He hadn’t noticed you. He stood bent over a console, goggles lowered over his visor, one prosthetic arm opened at the wrist to expose tools he was using simultaneously while his organic hand typed commands at impossible speed. His battle harness floated pieces of machinery around him like obedient satellites.

He looked worse than last night. No ceremonial armor now. Just work gear stained with grease and singed in places. Dark circles beneath his eyes. Shoulders tense enough to cut glass.

He muttered to himself constantly. “No, no, no, if the capacitor load drifts then the field collapses—unless I reroute the—why is that smoking?”

Something sparked violently. He swore, caught a falling component one-handed, soldered another in place without looking, then slammed a switch. For one hopeful second the central machine glowed blue. Then it shrieked, spat purple energy, and died.

Silence. Donnie froze.

You remained perfectly still in the doorway. Then, with a sound half snarl and half anguish, he ripped off the goggles and struck the metal table so hard the whole workstation rattled.

“DAMMIT!” His voice echoed through the lab. He hit the table again. “I recalibrated the entire matrix!” Again. “Why does nothing stay stable?”

He braced both hands on the surface, breathing hard. When he spoke next, it was lower. Rougher.

“Because you’re slipping.” The words were to himself. “You’re slower. You’re missing variables. You’re tired.” He laughed once, humorless. “Brilliant diagnosis, Donatello.”

He grabbed a broken component and hurled it across the room. It shattered against the wall. Then came the sentence that rooted you where you stood.

“Useless.” He said it quietly. Like he’d said it before. Many times. He dragged a hand over his face. “They need portals stabilized, shields repaired, supply drones rebuilt, defenses upgraded—and I can’t even keep one damn prototype alive for ten seconds.”

There was no audience now. No sarcasm sharpened for battle. No sneer. Just a man alone with impossible expectations. Something inside you shifted uncomfortably. You had seen arrogance in him so easily that you hadn’t considered what might be beneath it.

Pressure. Responsibility. Fear of failing everyone who still depended on him.

You thought of your own family measuring worth in usefulness. Maybe that language was not exclusive to wealth.

You stepped forward before you could overthink it. A boot scraped lightly on the floor. Donnie spun instantly, bo staff telescoping into his hand in one fluid motion, purple energy flaring to life—

Then he saw you. His expression soured on contact.

“Oh, excellent,” he said flatly. “A haunting.” He lowered the weapon, though not by much “What do you want?”

Up close, the strain was clearer. Tiny tremor in his fingers. Burn mark near one wrist. A fresh cut across his jawline. He’d probably patched himself and kept working.

You swallowed the first sharp reply that rose automatically. “I came to talk.”

“Then I recommend finding someone interested.”

He turned back to the dead machine. You remained there. He noticed after three seconds.

“Why,” he asked without looking, “are you still occupying oxygen?”

“I…” You hated that the word caught. “I came to apologize.”

That got him. He turned slowly, brows lifting behind the visor. “I’m sorry, could you repeat that? One of my auditory sensors must be malfunctioning.”

You folded your arms. “Don’t make this harder than it already is.”

“Impossible. Your presence does that naturally.”

You exhaled through your nose. “I shouldn’t have slapped you.”

“No, you shouldn’t have.”

“I was angry.”

“Yes, I gathered that from the violence.”

“And humiliated.”

“Join the club.”

The room held a taut silence. You looked around at the wrecked lab, the broken component on the floor, the machine he’d nearly beaten into submission.

“You looked at me like I was part of the problem,” you said quietly.

He stared at you for a long moment. “Weren’t you?”

The question stung because it wasn’t simple. “My family made the deal.”

“And you benefit from their empire.”

“I also suffer under it.”

His jaw tightened. “Congratulations. Welcome to nuance.”

You should have snapped back. Instead, your eyes flicked to the table dent from his fist.

“And you,” you said softly, “seem to suffer under yours too.”

That landed harder than the slap had. He went very still. For the first time since meeting him, he seemed unsure what weapon to choose.

So he chose anger. “Do not psychoanalyze me in my own lab.”

“I’m not.”

“Yes, you are.”

“I heard you.”

“Then perhaps learn the useful social skill of leaving.”

His voice had sharpened, but there was strain under it now. You stepped closer anyway.

“You’re exhausted.”

“I’m functioning.”

“You called yourself useless.”

His face darkened. “Enough.”

“You’re one person trying to hold together an entire resistance—”

“I said enough!”

The shout cracked through the room. Screens flickered with the force of it. You stopped. He was breathing hard again, chest rising and falling. Then, more quietly:

“You do not get to walk in here after publicly humiliating me, witness five minutes of private failure, and suddenly act like you understand anything.”

The words were precise. Cutting. And deserved. You stood there, pride wounded, apology unfinished. Then you did the one thing neither of you expected. You lowered your gaze.

“You’re right,” you said. That silenced him more effectively than shouting ever could. “I don’t understand your life,” you continued. “And you don’t understand mine.” You slipped the ring around your finger once, feeling its weight. “But I know what it is to be valued only when useful.”

His eyes moved to the ring. Then back to you. The lab hummed around you both. Two prisoners in different cages. Neither willing to admit how similar the bars looked.

Neither of you spoke for a long time after that. The lab settled into its own mechanical breathing—fans turning, monitors blinking, distant generators vibrating through the floor. Somewhere down the corridor, metal clanged and voices passed, then faded again.

Donnie remained beside the damaged workstation, one hand braced on the table. You stood a few feet away, uncertain for perhaps the first time in years what role to play.

Usually there was a script. Charm. Bite. Deflect. Win. This felt like standing unarmed.

He was the first to move. Slowly, he retracted the bo staff into its compact form and clipped it to his harness. Then he bent, picked up the shattered component from the floor, and dropped the broken pieces into a tray.

“You can sit,” he said flatly, not looking at you.

You glanced around. “There are no chairs.”

He pointed at a steel crate in the corner. “That one only electrocutes people on Tuesdays.”

You stared. He stared back. Then, to your surprise, the corner of his mouth twitched. It was so brief you almost thought you imagined it.

You crossed the room and sat on the crate anyway. “No shock yet,” you said.

“Disappointing.”

There was less venom in it now. Donnie turned back to the machine and began adjusting wiring with practiced hands. You watched in silence for another minute, then another.

Without the constant hostility between you, the room felt different. Still tense. But breathable.

“You always work this much?” you asked at last.

“Yes.”

“That wasn’t an answer.”

“It was efficient.” You rolled your eyes. He sighed, then relented. “Yes. Usually more.”

“Do you ever sleep?”

“Occasionally by accident.”

“That’s not healthy.”

“Neither is living through an alien occupation. We adapt.”

You frowned faintly. “Does someone ever tell you to stop?”

“My brothers try.”

“And?”

“I ignore them.”

“That tracks.”

He glanced sideways. “You’re remarkably judgmental for someone whose family schedules leisure.”

You almost snapped back out of habit. Instead, you surprised yourself by laughing softly.

“That was before.”

His hands slowed on the wires. “Before?”

“Before the sky changed.” You looked down at your palms. “Before money meant bunkers and generators instead of dresses and galas. Before I learned luxury can rot just as quickly as poverty.”

He returned to his work, quieter now. “I remember your family,” he said.

You blinked. “What?”

“Before the invasion. You hosted those absurd rooftop charity events.”

“You remember those?”

“I was there once.”

You stared at him. “No.”

“Yes.”

“Why would you be there?”

He gave you a look that implied your intelligence was under review. “Because I was invited.”

“You?”

He straightened slightly, offended. “I was already an accomplished young innovator.”

“You were a teenager.”

“I was an accomplished teenage innovator.”

You laughed again, genuinely this time. He paused. The sound seemed to catch him off guard.

“You wore that purple hoodie,” you said slowly, memory surfacing. “And argued with a hedge fund manager about drone ethics near the dessert table.”

His eyes narrowed. “You spilled sparkling water on my tablet.”

“That was you?”

“That was you?”

You both spoke at once, then stared. Fragments rearranged themselves in your head. The sharp-tongued stranger at formal events. The irritating genius who never seemed impressed by anyone. The boy you’d dismissed as rude because he refused to flatter people who expected it.

“Oh my god,” you muttered. “We’ve disliked each other for years.”

“Correction,” he said, returning to the console. “You disliked me first.”

“You were insufferable first.”

“I was correct first.”

“There it is.”

He made a small sound that might have been a laugh, quickly buried. You leaned back on the crate, studying him.

“When the marriage was announced… why were you really angry?”

He didn’t answer immediately. Because unlike before, this question mattered. Finally:

“Because I don’t like being used.” The simplicity of it cut deeper than drama would have. He adjusted a dial, voice lower now. “I’ve spent years turning myself into a machine people can rely on. Weapons, plans, repairs, calculations. If something breaks, I fix it. If someone needs something impossible, they bring it to me.”

He tapped the dead prototype. “And the moment politics needed solving, apparently I was also a bargaining chip.”

You swallowed. “I know that feeling.”

He looked at you then. “Do you?”

“Yes.” You twisted the ring unconsciously. “My family never asks what I want. They ask what I’m best for. A smile. A connection. A public face. A pleasing daughter. A profitable wife.” The words tasted ugly. “I thought marrying you meant losing the last part of myself I still owned.”

His expression changed—not softer exactly, but less armored. “I thought marrying you meant being chained to everything I resent.”

You huffed a sad laugh. “So we punished each other for crimes committed by other people.”

“Efficiently,” he said.

“Childishly.”

“Also true.”

Silence again. But warmer now. You slid off the crate and wandered closer to one of the side tables, where several half-built devices lay in neat rows.

“Can I touch anything?”

“No.” You drew back. He added, “Actually… that one is fine.”

He pointed to a circular drone shell. You picked it up carefully, turning it in your hands.

“It’s lighter than it looks.”

“Carbon weave frame. Reinforced joints.”

“What’s it for?”

“Courier support. Medical transport. Short-range mapping.”

You looked over your shoulder. “You made all this?”

“Some of it.”

There was no bragging in the answer. Only fact. You moved to another table.

“What about this?”

“A pulse emitter.”

“This?”

“Don’t touch that.”

You froze. “Why?”

“It may remove your eyebrows.”

You set it down immediately. He snorted.

“You did that on purpose.”

“Yes.”

“You’re awful.”

“Yet you remain.”

You found yourself smiling. Then, more seriously:

“How do you know all of this? Engineering, coding, weapons, mechanics…”

He shrugged one shoulder. “I was curious.”

“That simple?”

“It started there.” He gestured vaguely around the lab. “I liked understanding how things worked. Then improving them. Then surviving required it.”

You traced a finger over the edge of a blueprint. “No one in my family likes curiosity.”

“That seems inefficient.”

“They like certainty. Control. Predictable outcomes.”

“And you?”

You looked up. “I like asking questions.”

He held your gaze for a beat too long.

“That,” he said quietly, “is the first interesting thing I’ve heard about your family.”

You should have been insulted. Instead, your chest did something annoyingly unfamiliar. You stepped closer to the central machine.

“So what does this one do?”

His whole posture shifted. Not dramatically. But enough that you noticed. He straightened. Focus sharpened. Fatigue momentarily stepped aside.

“It’s a dimensional stabilizer,” he said.

You blinked. “A what?”

He moved beside you, activating a holo-screen. “If I can recalibrate Kraang portal residue into controlled resonance, we could create temporary safe corridors between sectors. Faster evacuation routes. Supply movement without surface exposure.”

He spoke quickly now, hands moving with the explanation. The bitterness, the hostility, the weariness—all thinned under the light of being understood. You listened. Truly listened. Even when you only grasped half of it.

“So this coil channels energy…”

“Yes.”

“And this matrix thing keeps it from exploding?”

“Crude phrasing, but yes.”

“And it failed because—”

“Because the harmonic tolerance drops under sustained load.”

You nodded seriously. “I know what those words mean.”

“You are lying.”

“Confidently.”

Another flicker of amusement. He adjusted the display so you could see better. For the next hour, the ruined city and the forced marriage and the families and politics all receded. You asked question after question. Some intelligent. Some ridiculous. He answered nearly all of them. At first dryly, then with reluctant patience, then with something close to enthusiasm.

And every so often, when you misunderstood something spectacularly, he’d stare at you in offended disbelief—and you’d laugh until he rolled his eyes. At one point your shoulder brushed his while leaning over the console. Neither of you moved away immediately. That

was when you realized something quietly dangerous. You did not hate him. Maybe you never truly had. Maybe it had only been easier to call fascination by a harsher name.

Chapter 25: NESTING SEASON —ft. rotTMNT Donatello

There were certain sounds in the lair that immediately told you what was happening. Mikey laughing like a gremlin? Chaos. Leo screaming dramatically? Probably avoidable chaos. Raph speaking in the soft voice he only used when trying not to lose his patience? Imminent disaster.

And then there was the sound currently echoing down the hall toward Donnie's lab: A metallic crash. A hissed curse. Something that suspiciously sounded like twenty pillows hitting the floor.

You paused mid-step, holding the smoothie you'd brought him, and stared at the sealed lab doors.

"…Don?"

Silence. Then, from inside:

"I AM BUSY."

You blinked. That voice had been pitched at least an octave higher than usual. You knocked once. "You okay?"

"Yes." Another crash. "No."

You sighed, smiling despite yourself. "I'm coming in."

"NO—"

Too late. The doors slid open. And there he was. Donatello Hamato. Genius. Mad scientist. Prideful menace. Purple-bandana tyrant of technology. Curled in the center of what could only be described as a heavily fortified pillow citadel. Blankets were stacked in layers. Cushions from the couch had clearly been stolen. Several beanbags had been dragged in. A weighted blanket hung dramatically from a monitor arm like a royal canopy. His tablet was balanced nearby. Snack wrappers littered the perimeter like battle casualties.

And right beside him—
Your hoodie. The grey oversized one you'd been looking for all week.

You slowly lowered the smoothie. He slowly pulled a pillow over half his face. The room was silent except for a tiny electric fan oscillating in shame.

"…Donnie."

"No."

"You built a nest."

“No.”

“You stole my hoodie.”

“Borrowed.”

“You’re sitting in it.”

“It is being utilized.”

“You have arranged it like a shrine.”

“It has structural importance.”

You stared. He stared back through narrowed eyes, refusing to blink. Then he abruptly snatched your hoodie and shoved it under three pillows.

You crossed your arms. He crossed his.

“…Are you nesting?”

His face instantly changed. Not fear exactly. Worse. Humiliation.

“I do not know what slanderous street-rat informed you of such biological nonsense, but I assure you I am simply optimizing my resting environment.”

“You’re in a pile of pillows.”

“A tactical pile.”

“You hissed when I opened the door.”

“I was startled!”

“You have my hoodie hidden like treasure.”

“It smells like you!”

The second the words left his mouth, time stopped. Donnie froze. You froze. Even the fan seemed to hesitate. Slowly, very slowly, he lowered his goggles over his eyes like they could protect him from reality.

“I am going to delete the last ten seconds,” he muttered.

You bit the inside of your cheek so hard not to laugh. “Oh my gosh.”

“Do not say oh my gosh in that tone.”

“You’re adorable.”

“I am devastatingly intimidating.”

“You’re blushing.”

“It is a heat regulation issue.”

“You made a little nest.”

“It is not little.”

He gestured dramatically around him. And honestly, he had a point. The thing took up half the lab.

You stepped closer, carefully navigating scattered tools and a suspicious number of stolen blankets.

He immediately straightened. “Do not come any closer.”

“Why?”

“Because.”

“That’s not a reason.”

“It is when I say it.”

You crouched near the edge of the pillow fortress. His fingers tightened around the blanket. His eyes darted to you, then away, then back. For someone who acted smug every second of the day, he looked profoundly nervous.

“You okay, Don?”

“I am fine.”

“You seem stressed.”

“I am not stressed.” A beat. Then, quieter: “This is biologically inconvenient.”

Your expression softened. He hated losing control of himself. Hated instincts, emotions, anything that made him feel less precise and composed. And right now he was surrounded by evidence that his body had apparently decided to become a dramatic little animal without consulting him. So naturally, he was spiraling.

You smiled gently. “It’s kind of sweet.”

“It is horrifying.”

“It’s sweet and horrifying.”

“…Acceptable compromise.”

You reached toward the nearest pillow. His hand shot out instantly. He slapped your wrist away. Then gasped. Then grabbed your wrist with both hands. And then dragged your hand

into the nest.

You stared at him. He stared at you.

“I—” He looked genuinely betrayed by himself. “I did not authorize that action.”

You burst out laughing. His face turned crimson.

“This is a nightmare.”

“No,” you wheezed, climbing closer. “This is the best day of my life.”

“Get out.”

“You literally pulled me in.”

“That was reflexive.”

You settled beside him among the pillows. He made a noise somewhere between offended and pleased. Then, after several seconds of rigid silence…he subtly adjusted a blanket over your legs.

You noticed. He noticed you noticed.

“Say nothing,” he warned.

“I said nothing.”

“Your face is loud.”

You grinned. He groaned dramatically and dropped backward into the nest, one arm over his eyes.

“I cannot survive this season.”

You leaned beside him, nudging his shoulder.

“You don’t have to survive it alone.”

His arm lowered just enough for one eye to peek at you. Then, in the most Donnie way possible, he sniffed.

“…You should stay.”

“Yeah?”

“You are… helpful.”

“With the emotional support?”

“With the hoodie replacement ratio.”

You laughed again. Then he quietly reached for your hand under the blanket. And when you squeezed back, his shoulders finally relaxed into the mountain of pillows he'd built.

"…Also," he muttered.

"Yeah?"

"If my brothers enter this room, I'm faking my death."

You laughed so hard at that last statement that you nearly fell backward into a pile of stolen couch cushions.

Donnie immediately shot upright. "Careful!"

One mechanical arm snapped out from behind him and caught you by the waist before you could tip over completely, setting you back upright in the nest with absurd precision.

You blinked. He blinked. The arm slowly retracted.

"…That was hazard prevention," he said stiffly.

"Obviously."

"Not concern."

"Of course not."

"Not affection either."

"Wouldn't dream of it."

He narrowed his eyes at you, suspicious of how agreeable you were being. Then he huffed and flopped back into the pillows again, muttering something about sarcasm being the lowest form of combat. You were still smiling when you leaned back beside him.

"I mean it though."

"That narrows nothing down."

"I like this side of you."

He stiffened so fast it was almost audible. There it was—that reflexive Donnie response whenever feelings got too close too quickly. Shoulders tense. Jaw set. Eyes darting anywhere but directly at you.

"This side of me is chemically compromised."

"This side of you is cute."

"This side of me is unstable."

“This side of you caught me when I almost fell.”

“That was robotics.”

“This side of you tucked a blanket over my legs.”

“That was temperature management.”

“This side of you stole my hoodie because it smells like me.”

He slapped both hands over his face. “You are abusing confidential information.”

You laughed again, softer this time.

He groaned into his palms. “You are never going to let that go.”

“Never.”

“Cruel.”

“Very.”

You shifted closer, enough that your shoulder touched his arm. Usually, under normal circumstances, that alone would earn you a long-suffering sigh and a very formal, “Please respect my personal bubble unless previously scheduled.”

Donnie liked you deeply. That had never been in question. But physical affection? He approached it like a skeptical scientist handling radioactive material. Controlled doses. Limited duration. Preferably on his terms and after at least three sarcastic remarks.

Now? Now he was lying in a pillow nest with your hoodie under his head like a sacred relic. And every few seconds, he kept unconsciously inching closer. You decided not to mention it.

Instead, you said lightly, “You know, most partners would be thrilled if their significant other suddenly got cuddly.”

“I am not cuddly.”

At that exact moment, he grabbed your wrist and tugged your arm across his middle. You both looked down at where he had placed it. Then up at each other.

He released you like your hand had burned him. “That did not occur.”

“It literally just occurred.”

“I reject your interpretation.”

“You manhandled me into spooning position.”

“I adjusted your posture.” You were laughing again, unable to stop. He looked scandalized by your joy. “This is why I keep secrets.”

“No, this is why you need supervision.”

He made a deeply offended sound. Then, after a few moments of silence, he spoke more quietly.

“I dislike feeling… dictated to.”

You turned your head toward him. His eyes were on the ceiling now, voice lower, less theatrical.

“My brain prefers systems. Logic. Predictability. Then suddenly my body decides it needs to build a textile fortress and hoard sentimental objects.”

“Sentimental objects?”

“Do not interrupt.”

“Sorry.”

He side-eyed you. Then continued. “And now proximity feels…” He gestured vaguely. “Necessary. Which is irritating.”

You softened immediately. Because beneath the sarcasm, there it was: vulnerability. He hated needing things he couldn’t quantify. Especially comfort.

You reached over and nudged his hand with your fingers. “It’s okay to need comfort, Don.”

“I know that intellectually.”

“But?”

“But I resent it emotionally.”

“That sounds about right.”

“Thank you.”

You smiled. Then, slowly, carefully, you opened your arms. No pressure. No teasing. Just an offer. He stared at you as if you had presented a difficult equation. Then glanced away. Then back. Then fixed a pillow that did not need fixing.

Then muttered, “This is undignified.”

And promptly folded himself into your arms. You barely kept from making a sound of triumph. He was warm. Solid. Slightly tense at first, like he expected to regret everything. But when your hand moved gently between his shoulders, that tension started melting by degrees.

His forehead ended up tucked near your neck. One hand fisted lightly in your sleeve.

You smiled into his shoulder. “There you are.”

“Do not narrate me.”

“You’re very cuddly.”

“I am strategically anchored.”

“You’re snuggling.”

“I am stabilizing.”

“You’re adorable.”

“I will leave.”

“No you won’t.”

“…Correct.”

You held him a little tighter. For several rare, peaceful minutes, Donatello said nothing at all. No quips. No corrections. No defensive sarcasm. Just slow breathing against you while the lab hummed quietly around the nest.

Then, in a voice muffled against your collarbone, he said: “If anyone enters this room, I’m vaporizing them.”

You laughed softly and kissed the top of his head. “Noted.”

A pause. Then his arms, very cautiously, wrapped around your waist.

“…Also,” he muttered.

“Yeah?”

“You smell better than the hoodie.”

You went still. Then grinned. He immediately realized what he’d said and groaned so hard he nearly tried to bury himself in the pillows.

“Delete that too.”

Chapter 26: “GOOD BOY” —ft. Bayverse Donatello

Chapter Summary

[he might have a praise kink]

The lair was louder than usual, and that was saying something. Metal clanked against concrete somewhere in the distance, Mikey’s music pulsed faintly through the walls, and the low hum of Donatello’s equipment filled the space like a constant heartbeat. It should’ve been comforting—you’d been here enough times for it to feel almost familiar—but right now, it just made your head throb.

Because your project was not working. Not even a little.

You sat cross-legged on the floor beside Donnie’s main workbench, surrounded by scattered components, wires, half-assembled joints, and the very expensive processor you were starting to regret ever touching. The small robotic arm you’d been trying to build lay limp in front of you, its metal fingers twitching occasionally like it was mocking you.

“It moved earlier,” you insisted, rubbing your face with both hands. “I swear it moved. It picked up a screwdriver and everything.”

Donatello, hunched over the console, didn’t look up immediately. His fingers moved quickly across the holographic interface, pulling up diagnostics, graphs, code you barely understood.

“I believe you,” he said, calm but focused. “But ‘it worked once’ is not exactly a stable baseline.”

You groaned softly and let yourself fall backward onto the floor, staring up at the ceiling pipes. “I’m going to fail this. My teacher said if the motor control isn’t consistent, it doesn’t count.”

From above, Donnie finally glanced at you, his expression softening just a bit behind his goggles.

“You’re not going to fail,” he said, like it was a simple fact. “You came to me. That already improves your odds significantly.”

You huffed a small laugh. “Wow. So humble.”

“I’m not humble,” he replied easily, turning back to the interface. “I’m accurate.”

That earned a faint smile from you—but it didn’t last long. Because when you pushed yourself up again and reached for the robotic arm, it immediately proved your frustration

right by doing absolutely nothing.

You tapped it. Nothing. You checked the connection cable. Still nothing.

"…Donnie."

"Mm?"

"It's dead."

"It's not dead," he said, still typing. "It's just not cooperating."

"Same thing," you muttered.

He crouched beside you then, finally shifting his full attention to the physical build. Up close, you could see the faint tension in his posture—the way his brow furrowed just slightly as he examined your wiring.

"Walk me through what you changed before it stopped working," he said.

So you did. Every step. Every adjustment. Every tiny decision you'd made that now felt like a mistake. At first, it was fine. Donnie nodded along, occasionally asking precise questions, pointing out small inefficiencies, but nothing catastrophic. You started to feel a flicker of hope again.

Until he paused.

"…You rerouted the feedback loop through this port?" he asked.

"…Yeah?"

"That port isn't designed for continuous signal cycling."

Your stomach dropped. "What does that mean?"

"It means," he said carefully, "you may have created a timing conflict between the processor and the actuator response."

You stared at him. "…In normal language?"

"It means they're arguing," he simplified. "And instead of resolving it, they're just… freezing."

"…Great," you whispered, dropping your head into your hands again. "Fantastic. I broke it."

"You didn't break it," he said quickly. "You just—complicated it."

"That's a nice way of saying I ruined it."

"It's a precise way of saying it's fixable."

You peeked at him through your fingers. “…It is?”

He gave a small nod, already reaching for tools. “Probably.”

“Probably?” you echoed weakly.

He hesitated for half a second. “…There’s a high probability.”

You stared at him flatly. “…Donnie.”

“Yes?”

“That’s not comforting.”

From somewhere behind you, you heard Raphael’s voice echo through the lair.

“Yo, is it supposed to smell like burnt wires over there?!”

You both froze. Then slowly turned to look at the robot. A thin wisp of smoke curled up from one of the joints.

“…Okay,” Donnie said quickly, grabbing a tool and unplugging the power source. “That part is new.”

“NEW?!” you yelped, scrambling back.

“I said high probability, not certainty!”

“Oh my god—”

Mikey popped his head into the lab entrance, grinning. “Heyyy, science fair’s going great, huh?”

“Out,” Donnie said immediately, not even looking at him.

“But—”

“Out.”

Mikey raised his hands in surrender, still smiling as he backed away. “Good luck, lovebirds!”

“WE’RE NOT—” you started, but he was already gone.

You dropped your face into your hands again with a groan. “This is a disaster.”

For a moment, neither of you spoke. The lab felt heavier now, the earlier energy replaced with frustration and creeping doubt.

Donnie exhaled slowly beside you.

“…Okay,” he said, quieter this time. “Let’s reset.”

You glanced at him. “Reset?”

“We strip it down to the core systems,” he explained, already starting to carefully disconnect parts. “No shortcuts. No assumptions. We rebuild the control flow from scratch.”

“That’s going to take forever…”

“Yes,” he said simply.

You slumped. “…I’m never finishing this.”

He paused for just a second—then looked at you again, more directly this time.

“You are,” he said, steady and certain. “But not if you give up halfway through the problem.”

You held his gaze for a moment. There was no teasing in his tone now. No smugness. Just… quiet confidence. And somehow, that made you sit up a little straighter.

“…Okay,” you sighed. “Fine. We reset.”

“Good,” he nodded.

And just like that, you both got to work again. Time passed—too fast and too slow at the same time. Your hands got dirty with grease, your fingers fumbled wires, your brain started to blur from trying to follow Donnie’s explanations. At some point, you stopped talking as much, focusing instead on just keeping up.

It wasn’t smooth. It wasn’t easy. At least three more things went wrong. At one point, the arm spasmed violently and knocked over a screwdriver rack. At another, the system froze again and you nearly lost it completely.

“Why is it still not working?!” you snapped at one point, pushing yourself away from the bench. “We did everything right this time!”

Donnie didn’t answer immediately. He was staring at the interface again, completely still.

“…Donnie?”

“…Wait,” he murmured.

Something in his tone made you stop. He leaned in closer, eyes scanning rapidly now, fingers moving again—but slower this time. More precise.

“…There,” he said under his breath.

You blinked. “What?”

He didn’t explain. Just reached over, adjusted a single connection, then typed something into the console. The lab seemed to go quiet for a second. Then—

A soft whirr.

You both froze. The robotic arm twitched. Then lifted. Slowly, carefully… it closed its metal fingers around the screwdriver lying in front of it. And picked it up.

Your eyes went wide. "…No way."

Donnie didn't move. The arm rotated slightly, steady, controlled—then placed the screwdriver back down exactly where it had been. No shaking. No freezing. No smoke. Silence.

Then—

"IT WORKS—" you shouted, practically launching forward. "Donnie, it works!!"

He let out a breath you didn't even realize he'd been holding, shoulders finally relaxing.

"…Yes," he said, quieter—but there was relief there. A lot of it.

You turned to him, face lit up, all the stress from before gone in an instant. "That was insane—how did you—what did you even fix?!"

"A minor timing inconsistency in the signal relay," he said, adjusting his goggles slightly, though you could see the faintest hint of pride creeping in. "It was causing a micro-delay between input and execution."

You stared at him. "…You make that sound like it's nothing."

"It wasn't nothing," he admitted. "It was just… hidden."

You shook your head, still smiling, adrenaline buzzing through you. "That was amazing."

He blinked slightly at that. You didn't even think about it—you were still riding the high of relief, of finally seeing it work after all that frustration. So it just… slipped out.

"Good boy."

The moment the words left your mouth—

Everything stopped. Donnie froze. Completely.

And slowly—very slowly—you realized what you'd just said. But you didn't take it back. You just watched him. Because the effect was immediate. His posture stiffened, shoulders pulling in just slightly. His fingers twitched like he didn't know what to do with them anymore. Even behind the goggles, you could tell his eyes had widened.

"…I—" he started. Then stopped. Tried again. "…That—was—uh…"

He adjusted his glasses again, unnecessarily this time, clearly buying himself time. His voice dropped a little, losing its usual confident rhythm.

"…Not—statistically relevant to the outcome."

You blinked. "…Donnie."

"Yes?" he said quickly.

"…You're blushing."

"I am not."

"You are."

"I am experiencing a minor thermal fluctuation."

You stared at him. "…You're blushing," you repeated, softer this time.

He looked away. And that—more than anything—gave him away. Because Donatello didn't look away. Not like that. Not all nervous and fidgety and… shy.

"…It was just—" he tried again, clearing his throat. "An unnecessary—verbal—affirmation."

You tilted your head slightly, watching him struggle. And for once—

The genius didn't have the words.

The lab, still filled with the quiet hum of machines, suddenly felt a lot smaller. And a lot more charged. He adjusted something on the console that didn't need adjusting.

"…We should—run another test," he muttered.

You didn't answer right away. For a few seconds after his awkward attempt at recovery, neither of you moved.

The robotic arm sat there, perfectly still now, like it had already done its part and left you alone to deal with… whatever this was.

Donnie kept pretending to adjust settings on the console, movements just a little too precise, a little too forced. You, on the other hand, were still crouched beside him, watching.

Really watching.

And the more he avoided looking at you, the more something in your expression shifted—subtle at first, then unmistakably amused.

"…Donnie."

"Yes?" he answered immediately, still not turning.

You leaned slightly closer, voice lighter now, almost teasing. "…Do you have, like… a praise kink or something?"

This time, he did freeze. Not subtly. Not gracefully. Completely.

“…I—what—no—” he stammered, words tripping over each other as he finally turned to you, eyes wide behind his glasses. “That is—an inaccurate and highly—mischaracterized—”

He stopped, clearly unable to even finish the sentence. You raised an eyebrow, the corner of your mouth twitching.

“Mmhm.”

“I do not—” he tried again, straightening slightly as if posture alone could save him, “have a praise kink.”

You blinked at him. “…You absolutely do.”

“I do not,” he insisted quickly, but his voice cracked just enough to betray him.

“Donnie.”

“Yes?”

“You short-circuited.”

“I did not short-circuit.”

“You literally stopped functioning.”

“That was a—momentary lapse in—processing prioritization.”

You couldn’t help it—you laughed. Not loudly, not mockingly… just genuinely amused. And somehow, that made it worse for him. Because now he looked even more flustered, shifting his weight slightly, fingers tapping restlessly against the console.

“It was a—contextually unexpected statement,” he muttered, trying to regain control of the situation. “Anyone would have—paused.”

“Not like that,” you said, still smiling.

He opened his mouth to argue—

Then stopped. Because he knew you were right. And that only made his shoulders tense again.

For a moment, you just watched him like that—usually so composed, so confident, always ten steps ahead… and now completely thrown off by two simple words. It was kind of unfair how endearing it was.

But eventually, your expression softened. The teasing edge faded, replaced by something quieter. Warmer.

“…Hey,” you said, more gently this time.

That got his attention in a different way. He looked at you again, still a little guarded, like he wasn't sure if you were about to tease him more. But you didn't.

"Seriously," you continued, shifting a bit closer to the workbench, glancing briefly at the robotic arm before looking back at him. "Thank you."

He blinked.

"I mean it," you added. "I was completely stuck. Like… beyond stuck. And you just—" you gestured vaguely at the project, "—fixed it."

There was no teasing in your voice now. No joking. Just honesty.

"You basically saved my grade."

For a second, he didn't respond. And when he did, it was quieter. More controlled again—but not in the same way as before.

"It wasn't… that significant," he said, looking away briefly. "The issue was identifiable. It just required—time."

You frowned slightly. "Donnie."

"It's true," he insisted, adjusting his goggles again, though his tone had softened. "You had already done most of the work. Your structural design was sound. The error was… specific."

"That doesn't mean I would've found it," you replied.

He hesitated. "…Eventually," he said, though there wasn't much conviction behind it.

You shook your head a little, a small smile returning—but gentler this time. "No," you said simply. "I wouldn't have."

That landed. You could see it in the way he stilled again—but not like before. Not flustered. Just… listening.

"You helped me," you continued. "A lot. So… thank you."

There was a pause. A real one. The kind that lingers just long enough to matter. Donnie exhaled slowly, some of the tension leaving his shoulders again.

"…You're welcome," he said, quieter now.

Not dismissive. Not deflecting. Just… accepting it. And for a moment, the lab felt different again. Still filled with the hum of machines, the faint echo of distant noise—but here, in this little space between you, it felt calmer. Softer.

Then, almost as if he couldn't leave it there too long, Donnie cleared his throat lightly and gestured toward the robotic arm.

“…We should still run additional tests,” he said. “To ensure long-term stability.”

You smiled faintly. “Of course you’d say that.”

“It’s the logical next step.”

“Yeah,” you nodded, shifting slightly closer again, reaching for the controls. “Wouldn’t want your ‘momentary lapse in processing prioritization’ to ruin my grade later.”

He made a small, quiet noise of protest at that. But he didn’t argue. And this time, when your shoulder brushed his as you leaned in…he definitely noticed.

Chapter 27: “TALK IT OUT” —ft. MM Raphael

Chapter Summary

[He thinks love it stupid because he doesn’t believe anyone could love him]

The lair always had this strange, comforting chaos to it. The hum of old electronics, the distant drip of water somewhere deep in the tunnels, the faint smell of pizza that never fully went away no matter how much they insisted they “cleaned.” You had gotten used to it—more than used to it, actually. It felt… normal now.

Which was probably why you were sitting cross-legged on the couch, your homework completely forgotten on the coffee table, while Donnie’s tablet lay abandoned beside it.

“Okay, but listen,” you said, leaning forward, barely holding back a grin. “You stared at her for, like, five full seconds. That’s not subtle.”

“I did not,” Leo shot back immediately from the beanbag, his voice cracking just enough to betray him.

Mikey gasped dramatically from the floor, rolling onto his stomach. “Five seconds?? Bro, that’s basically a love confession in turtle time.”

“It is not a thing!” Leo insisted, sitting up straighter, pointing at Mikey like that would somehow restore his dignity. “And I wasn’t staring—I was observing.”

Donnie didn’t even look up from where he was half-reclined in the chair, arms crossed. “Your ‘observations’ included elevated heart rate, dilated pupils, and a noticeable delay in verbal response time. Statistically speaking, you have a crush.”

You snorted, covering your mouth, while Mikey let out an “OHHHHH” like he’d just witnessed the best roast of the century.

Leo groaned, dragging his hands down his face. “Can I get one day—one—without being psychologically analyzed?”

“No,” Donnie said plainly.

“Absolutely not,” you added, nudging Leo’s foot with yours.

Raph, who had been leaning against the wall this whole time, arms crossed and watching with a half-smirk, finally pushed himself off and walked over. His presence shifted things a little—he always did. Not enough to stop the teasing, but enough to sharpen it.

“Y’know,” he said, voice low but amused, “they got a point. You been actin’ real weird around April.”

Leo groaned louder. “Oh my god, not you too.”

“What?” Raph shrugged, dropping onto the arm of the couch beside you. “You trip over your words, you try to act cool—fail, by the way—and then you just… stare.”

“I do not stare!”

“You do,” you and Mikey said in unison.

Leo looked personally betrayed. “You’re supposed to be on my side!”

“I am on your side,” you said, grinning. “I want you to succeed. Which means admitting you like her.”

“I don’t—” he started, then stopped, then groaned again. “Okay, maybe I do, but that doesn’t mean I have to say anything about it!”

Mikey rolled onto his back, kicking his legs in the air. “Bro, imagine if she likes you too and you’re just out here wasting time. That’s tragic.”

Donnie finally glanced up. “Statistically unlikely without mutual communication.”

“THANK YOU,” Leo pointed at Donnie.

“However,” Donnie added, “not doing anything guarantees failure.”

Leo’s arm dropped slowly. “…I hate all of you.”

You laughed softly, shaking your head, but your eyes flicked briefly toward Raph. He was still smirking—but there was something else there too. Something quieter. Harder to read. And then, of course, he opened his mouth again.

“Nah, seriously though,” Raph said, leaning forward slightly, elbows on his knees. “What’re you scared of? She’s just a girl.”

Leo blinked. “Just a girl? Dude, that’s exactly why it’s terrifying.”

“That makes zero sense.”

“It makes perfect sense!”

Raph huffed a short laugh. “Man, if I liked someone, I’d just tell ’em.”

There was a split-second pause.

You tilted your head slightly. “Oh yeah?”

Mikey immediately sat up. “WAIT—hold up—if?? That sounded suspiciously specific.”

Raph stiffened, just a little. “It ain’t.”

Leo squinted at him, something shifting behind his expression. “Oh, now that’s interesting.”

Raph rolled his eyes. “Don’t start.”

But Leo leaned forward, a slow grin spreading across his face—the kind that meant he’d just found something he could use.

“Nah, nah,” Leo said, voice suddenly way too casual. “You’re out here giving me advice… like you’re some kinda expert.”

“I am an expert,” Raph shot back.

“On what? Hypotheticals?” Leo tilted his head. “Or is it because you like a human too?”

The words slipped out fast—too fast. And the moment they landed, everything stopped. The room didn’t just go quiet—it froze. Mikey’s mouth literally fell open. Donnie’s eyes snapped up from his tablet. You felt your chest tighten slightly without really knowing why.

Raph didn’t move at first. Then slowly… his hands clenched. Not dramatically. Not enough for anyone to call it out. But you saw it—the subtle tension in his fingers, the way his jaw tightened just slightly, like he was holding something back.

His eyes didn’t go to Leo. They didn’t go to Mikey. They didn’t even go to Donnie. They flickered—just for a second—to you. And then away.

No one said anything. Not Leo, who now looked like he instantly regretted opening his mouth. Not Mikey, who was practically vibrating with questions but somehow, for once, stayed silent. Not even you.

The air felt heavier now. Different.

And Raph… Raph just sat there, fists still subtly clenched, like he was waiting—for someone to say something.

No one moved at first. The silence stretched in that uncomfortable way where you could feel everyone thinking but no one daring to say anything out loud. Leo looked like he was mentally replaying what he’d just said, searching for a way to undo it. Mikey’s eyes kept darting between Raph and you, wide and uncharacteristically quiet. Even Donnie, who usually had something analytical to add, stayed still—watching.

Raph exhaled through his nose, slow and controlled, like he was forcing himself to stay calm.

“Yeah,” he muttered, voice low. “Okay.”

And then he stood up.

It wasn’t dramatic. He didn’t slam anything or raise his voice. But that almost made it worse. The tension followed him as he turned and walked away from the living area, heading toward

the shared bedroom like he just needed space—no explanation, no argument, nothing.

A second later, there was a loud clatter from down the tunnel. You didn't need to see it to know something had been knocked over.

Back in the living room, Mikey winced. "…That sounded expensive."

Donnie adjusted his glasses slightly. "It was the coffee table."

Leo threw his hands up. "Okay—okay! I didn't do anything, right? That wasn't that bad."

Three pairs of eyes turned to him.

"Leo," you said slowly, "you basically exposed him."

"I didn't know it was—like—real!" he defended, gesturing wildly. "I thought it was just—y'know—trash talk!"

"Mm," Donnie hummed. "Your assumption lacked sufficient data."

"That is not helpful, Donnie!"

Mikey leaned closer to Leo, whispering loudly, "Dude… what if he actually does like someone??"

Leo groaned, dragging his hands down his face again. "I'm gonna die."

You didn't say anything else. You just stood up. The movement was enough to make them all look at you, but you didn't explain. You didn't need to. Your eyes flicked toward the hallway where Raph had disappeared, and then you started walking.

"Hey—" Leo called after you, a little panicked now. "You don't have to—like—it's fine, right?"

You paused just long enough to glance back. "It's not fine," you said simply. And then you kept going.

The tunnel felt quieter the farther you got from the main room. The usual noise faded, replaced by that low, distant echo of the lair. When you reached the bedroom entrance, you slowed slightly.

You could already tell. The coffee table was flipped on its side near the wall, one leg bent at an awkward angle. A couple of scattered things—old wrappers, a magazine, Donnie's screwdriver—were strewn across the floor like collateral damage.

You let out a small breath. Yeah. He definitely didn't want to talk.

Raph was on his bed, sitting near the edge, elbows on his knees, staring down at the floor. His shoulders were tense, the kind of tension that didn't come from anger alone—something heavier sat underneath it.

For a moment, you just stood there. You could leave. Honestly, that would probably be the easier option. But instead, you stepped inside.

“Hey,” you said softly.

He didn’t look up.

You hesitated for half a second, then added, “Can I stay?”

That got a reaction—barely. His jaw shifted slightly, like he was debating something.

“…Do what you want,” he muttered.

Not exactly welcoming. But not a no either. So you walked over and sat down on the far edge of his bed, leaving a bit of space between you. Not too close. Not pushing. For a few seconds, neither of you spoke.

Then, without looking at you, Raph scoffed quietly. “Leo’s lying,” he said. “He don’t know what he’s talkin’ about.” You didn’t answer right away. “Plus,” he added, voice a little sharper now, “even if I did—doesn’t matter. Love’s stupid anyway.”

There it was.

“‘Love’s stupid,’” you repeated under your breath.

“And for weaks,” he continued, leaning back slightly, crossing his arms like he was building a wall around himself. “Gets in the way. Makes people do dumb stuff.”

You couldn’t help it. A small laugh slipped out. Not loud. Not mocking. Just… genuine.

Raph’s head snapped toward you, frowning. “What?”

You shook your head, still smiling a little. “Nothing.”

“No, what?” he pressed. “Why’re you laughin’?”

You turned slightly to face him more, tucking one leg under you. “Because I don’t believe you.”

His frown deepened. “Believe what?”

“That you actually think that.”

“I do.”

“You don’t.”

“I literally just said I do.”

“And I literally don’t buy it,” you shot back lightly.

There was a beat where he just stared at you, clearly annoyed—but not in the way he had been earlier. This was different. Familiar.

“Man, you’re impossible,” he muttered.

You shrugged, nudging his arm lightly with your elbow. “Takes one to know one.”

He huffed quietly, but didn’t move away.

“That whole ‘love is for weaks’ thing?” you went on, softer now but still teasing at the edges. “That doesn’t sound like you. Sounds like something you want to believe.”

He didn’t answer. But his shoulders dropped—just a little.

You nudged him again, a bit more insistent this time. “C’mon. You? The guy who literally throws himself in front of danger for people he cares about? Yeah, sure. Totally anti-feelings.”

“That’s different,” he muttered.

“Mhm.”

“It is.”

“Sure.”

He shot you a look. “You always gotta argue?”

“Only when you’re wrong.”

“I’m not wrong.”

“You are.”

“I’m not.”

You smiled slightly, bumping his shoulder again, softer this time. And he didn’t push you away. The room settled into a quieter kind of stillness after that. Not the tense, heavy silence from before—but something softer, like the air had finally stopped pressing down on both of you. The distant sounds of the lair barely reached this far, leaving just the faint hum of everything in the background.

You shifted slightly on the bed, glancing up at the ceiling for a moment, then letting yourself fall back onto it with a quiet exhale. Your arms rested loosely at your sides, one knee bent slightly as you got comfortable.

Raph stayed sitting for a few seconds, watching you out of the corner of his eye like he wasn’t entirely sure what you were doing—but he didn’t tell you to move.

“You know,” you started, voice softer now, more thoughtful, “we’ve been kinda hypocritical.”

Raph snorted faintly. “We? Nah, that’s all you guys.”

You smiled a little at that, eyes still on the ceiling. “Okay, yeah, fair. But still.”

He didn’t answer, but you could feel his attention shift toward you.

“We’ve been making fun of Leo all afternoon for liking April,” you went on. “Like it’s this huge, embarrassing thing.”

“It is embarrassing,” Raph muttered automatically.

You tilted your head slightly in his direction. “Is it?”

He hesitated.

“…Yeah.”

“Why?”

That made him pause longer.

“…I dunno,” he admitted, quieter this time. “It just is.”

You hummed softly, turning your gaze back upward. “I don’t think it is.”

He didn’t argue right away.

“It’s just… liking someone,” you said, a small shrug in your voice. “It’s not like he’s doing anything wrong. He’s not hurting anyone. He just—feels something.”

Raph shifted beside you, his arms uncrossing slowly as he leaned back a little, supporting himself with his hands.

“Still makes him act weird,” he said.

“Yeah,” you agreed easily. “But that’s kind of the point.”

He frowned slightly at that, glancing at you again. “How’s that the point?”

You smiled faintly, eyes soft. “Because it matters to him.”

That answer lingered in the space between you. For a moment, neither of you spoke again.

Then you added, quieter, “And honestly… it’s not a bad thing. Liking someone.”

Raph let out a slow breath, looking away. “Maybe for him.”

You turned your head slightly, enough to look at him now. “Why not for you?”

He didn't answer. His jaw tightened just a little, gaze fixed somewhere across the room like he was trying to find the right words—or avoid them entirely.

"…Just doesn't work like that," he muttered.

You watched him for a second, then spoke more gently. "You don't think someone could like you?"

That got a reaction.

His shoulders tensed again, but not in the same way as before—this time it felt smaller. Quieter.

Raph huffed under his breath. "C'mon."

"I'm serious."

He shook his head, like the idea itself didn't even deserve consideration. "Nah. Not really."

"Why?"

He hesitated.

Then, after a second, he pushed himself back further and finally laid down beside you, staring up at the same ceiling. There was still a bit of space between you—but less than before.

"I'm not like Leo," he said after a moment. "Or Mikey."

You stayed quiet, letting him keep going.

"I get mad," he added, more bluntly. "A lot. I mess stuff up. I break things." His eyes flicked briefly toward the overturned coffee table across the room. "Not exactly… likable."

There was no self-pity in his voice. Just… honesty.

You turned onto your side to face him properly now, studying his expression. He still wasn't looking at you—just up at the ceiling, like it was easier that way.

"Maybe," you said softly, "someone likes that about you."

That made him finally glance at you. "What?"

You shrugged lightly, a small smile tugging at your lips. "Not the breaking stuff," you added. "But… the rest."

He frowned, confused. "The rest?"

"You care," you said simply. "A lot. You just show it differently."

He looked unconvinced.

“You’re protective,” you went on. “You’re honest. You don’t pretend to be something you’re not.” Your voice softened slightly. “And yeah, you get angry—but it’s not random. It’s because things matter to you.”

Raph didn’t interrupt this time. He just listened.

“And maybe,” you added, nudging his arm lightly with your fingers, softer than before, “someone out there thinks that’s… kinda important.”

He held your gaze for a second longer than usual this time. Like he was trying to figure out if you actually meant it.

“…You really think that?” he asked, quieter now.

You didn’t hesitate. “Yeah.”

Something in his expression shifted again. Not completely—he still looked unsure, still a little guarded—but the edge had softened. The tension that had been sitting in his shoulders earlier wasn’t as tight anymore.

“…Weird,” he muttered after a second.

You let out a small laugh. “You’re one to talk.”

He huffed, but there was no bite to it this time. And then, without really thinking about it, his arm shifted just slightly—close enough that it brushed against yours. He didn’t pull away. Neither did you.

The conversation faded after that, not because there was nothing left to say—but because it didn’t feel necessary anymore. The quiet that settled in this time felt different. Comfortable.

The quiet lingered just a little too long. Not uncomfortable—just… fragile. Like if either of you said the wrong thing, it might snap again. So, naturally, you didn’t say anything at all. You just shifted.

At first, it was subtle—your foot nudging lightly against his ankle, testing. Raph glanced at you out of the corner of his eye, already suspicious.

“…What?” he asked.

You didn’t answer. Instead, you pushed a little harder.

He frowned. “Don’t—”

Too late. You suddenly lunged sideways, grabbing onto his arm and trying to shove him onto his back with a grin that completely betrayed your intentions.

Raph blinked in surprise. “Yo—HEY—”

A second later, he let out a short laugh—low, instinctive—as he immediately reacted, twisting his body and catching your wrist before you could gain any real advantage.

“Oh, that’s how it is now?” he said, a hint of amusement slipping into his voice.

You grinned, already trying to push against him again. “Gotta change the topic somehow.”

“By attacking me?”

“Exactly.”

“Man—” he huffed, but he was already moving with you, shifting his weight, rolling just enough to counter you without actually putting force behind it.

That was the thing with Raph. Even now—especially now—you could feel it. He was holding back. Always.

His grip on your wrist was firm, but careful. When he rolled you onto your back, it wasn’t rough—it was controlled, like he was constantly measuring how much strength he could use without hurting you.

You pushed against his shoulder, laughing under your breath. “You’re going easy on me.”

“Yeah, no kidding,” he shot back. “You’d be on the floor already.”

“You’re rude.”

“You started it!”

You twisted again, managing to slip one arm free and shove at his side, which made him shift just enough for you to roll halfway on top of him. It wasn’t graceful—more chaotic than anything—but it worked.

“Ha!” you said, a little out of breath.

Raph raised an eyebrow. “You call that a win?”

“Let me have this.”

He snorted, but didn’t immediately flip you back over. Instead, he let himself fall flat against the bed, one arm loosely braced near your side in case you lost balance. The movement, the laughter, the back-and-forth—it burned off the last of that heavy tension from before. Bit by bit, things felt normal again.

Or… your version of normal.

After a few more seconds of struggling, you both slowed down—not really stopping, just… running out of momentum. Your movements turned lazy, less about winning and more about not quite wanting the moment to end.

By the time you stilled, you were hovering slightly over him, one hand braced near his shoulder, your breathing a little uneven. Raph looked up at you, chest rising and falling steadily, a faint smirk still on his face—but softer now. Less guarded.

You realized then how close you were. And instead of pulling away immediately, you just… stayed there for a second. Looking at him.

There was a light sheen of sweat on both of you from the brief wrestling, your hair slightly out of place, his bandana pushed back just enough to reveal more of his expression than usual.

You smiled. Not teasing this time. Something quieter.

"That," you said softly, "is what I like about you."

Raph blinked, caught off guard. "What?"

You shifted slightly, still above him but more relaxed now. "This."

He frowned a little, confused. "We just tried to throw each other off a bed."

You huffed a small laugh. "No, idiot. Not that."

He raised an eyebrow at the insult, but didn't interrupt. You glanced down at where his hand still rested near your arm—not gripping, just there, steady. Careful.

"You're strong," you said. "Like… really strong. Way more than you realize sometimes."

He scoffed lightly. "Pretty sure I know."

"Yeah, physically," you corrected. "But I mean… how you handle it."

That made him pause.

"You could've easily pinned me in two seconds," you went on. "Or actually won." A small smile tugged at your lips. "But you didn't."

Raph looked away slightly, like it wasn't a big deal. "Didn't wanna hurt you."

"I know," you said gently.

That made him glance back at you.

"And that's the point." He stayed quiet. "You're always careful with me," you added, softer now. "No matter how strong you are."

For a second, he didn't react at all. Then his expression shifted—just a little. Not dramatic, not obvious. But enough. Like something in him didn't quite know what to do with that. You held his gaze for a moment longer. Then, before it could turn into something heavier again, you leaned down slightly—

and pressed a quick, light kiss to his cheek.

It was brief. Soft. Almost casual. But it landed.

Raph froze. Not tense. Not pulling away. Just… still. By the time he processed it, you were already moving.

You pushed yourself off him, sliding back onto your feet with an easy motion, brushing your hands against your clothes like nothing had happened—except your smile gave you away.

“Anyway,” you said, tone lighter again, heading toward the door, “you should probably fix the coffee table before Donnie has a breakdown.”

Raph sat up slowly, still watching you. You paused at the entrance, turning back just enough to look at him one last time. And your voice softened again—just for a second.

“You’re loved too, y’know.”

No teasing. No joke. Just truth. Then you slipped out of the room before he could respond.

Raph stayed where he was. Sitting on the edge of his bed, staring at the space where you’d just been, one hand slowly lifting to his cheek like he could still feel it there.

The room was quiet again. But not heavy. Not anymore. After a moment, he let out a quiet breath, shaking his head slightly under his breath.

“…Weird,” he muttered.

But there was no bite to it. Just something softer lingering underneath.

Chapter 28: “LAB INCIDENT” —ft. 2012 Donatello

Chapter Summary

[he’s exhausted and he snaps at you]

The lair felt different at night.

Not quieter—there was always the distant hum of machinery, the drip of water somewhere deep in the tunnels—but heavier. Like the air itself knew something was off. You noticed it the moment you stepped inside, arms folded tight against yourself as if that would keep the unease from settling in your chest.

Leo had been the one to call you. His voice was calm, as always, but there had been something underneath it—tight, controlled in a way that told you things had already gone too far.

“Two days,” he had said. “He hasn’t slept. Won’t listen to us.”

You didn’t need him to say Donnie’s name. You knew.

And now, standing just outside the lab, that faint purple glow bleeding into the hallway, you could practically feel Donnie on the other side of the door. Focused. Wired. Running on fumes and stubbornness.

You exhaled slowly, then pushed the door open.

The lab was a mess—but not the usual organized chaos. This was different. Tools scattered where they didn’t belong, half-finished prototypes blinking weakly on tables, wires trailing across the floor like traps waiting to catch an ankle. Screens flickered with lines of code and schematics, too many open at once.

And in the middle of it all—Donnie. He didn’t even turn when you walked in.

His hands moved quickly, almost too quickly, fingers tapping, adjusting, recalibrating. There was a stiffness to him, a jittery edge that made your stomach twist.

“Donnie,” you said gently. Nothing. You stepped closer, careful not to trip over anything. “Hey… genius.”

A pause. Just a fraction of a second.

Then, without looking at you, “Not now.”

Your brows pulled together. That wasn't unusual on its own—but the tone was. Shorter. Sharper. Still, you didn't back off. You knew him too well for that.

You moved around the table so you were in his line of sight, forcing him to acknowledge you. "You've been in here for two days."

"I'm aware," he muttered, still not really looking at you.

"And you haven't slept."

"I don't need a status report."

Okay. That edge again.

You softened your voice, trying a different angle. "Leo told me you've been pushing non-stop. Whatever it is, it can wait a few hours. You need to rest."

That got his attention—but not in the way you hoped.

His hands stilled for a second before resuming, faster this time. "No. It can't."

You frowned, stepping a little closer. "Donnie—"

"I said it can't," he snapped, sharper now.

The word hit harder than it should have.

You hesitated, but only for a second. "You're not thinking straight. You're exhausted."

"I am perfectly capable of assessing my own condition," he shot back.

Your chest tightened, but you kept going. "Then assess this: you're running on zero sleep, your hands are shaking, and you're one wrong move away from messing up whatever you're working on."

That did it. His hands slammed down onto the table with a loud clatter, tools rattling from the impact. He turned on you so suddenly it made you flinch.

"Would you just drop it?!" he snapped.

The volume alone was enough to freeze you. Donnie didn't yell at you. Ever. But this—this wasn't just raised frustration. His voice was tight, strained, like something wound too far and finally snapping.

You blinked, caught off guard, but tried again anyway. "I'm just trying to help—"

"I don't need your help!" he cut in, louder now. "I need you to stop distracting me!"

The words hit like a slap. You went still.

He didn't stop. "I have an actual problem to solve here, and I don't have time to babysit your concerns about my sleep schedule!" His voice cracked slightly at the edges, but it didn't soften him. If anything, it made him push harder. "So unless you suddenly became an expert in advanced mutagen stabilization—"

"I didn't—" you started, but your voice came out smaller than you intended.

"—then you're not helping!" he finished sharply.

Silence. Heavy. Suffocating. You just stood there. Frozen. Your mind struggled to catch up with what just happened, replaying the words over and over like they didn't quite make sense. Donnie—your Donnie—had never talked to you like that. Not even close. You didn't move. Didn't speak. You weren't even sure you were breathing properly.

And that's when the others burst in. The door slid open with a sharp noise, footsteps quick and urgent. Leo was first, followed closely by Raph and Mikey, all of them clearly drawn by the shouting.

"What the shell is going on—" Raph started, but stopped short when he saw you.

Standing there. Completely still. And Donnie—

Still breathing hard, shoulders tense, anger lingering in every line of his body.

The room felt like it was holding its breath. And you… you still hadn't moved. For a second, no one spoke. The lab lights flickered softly, machines humming like nothing had happened, like the tension slicing through the room wasn't real. But it was. It sat heavy in your chest, in the way your fingers felt stiff at your sides, in the way Donnie's breathing hadn't quite settled.

Leo's eyes moved quickly between the two of you, sharp and assessing. "Donnie," he said carefully, his voice low but firm, "what's going on?"

Donnie didn't answer right away. He turned halfway back toward his workstation, like he could just… go back to it. Like none of this mattered. But his hands hovered over the controls instead of moving, fingers twitching with leftover frustration.

"I'm working," he said finally, clipped. "That's what's going on."

Raph let out a short, disbelieving scoff. "Nah, don't pull that," he shot back, stepping further into the room. "We heard you yellin'. At them."

Your shoulders tensed slightly at that, but you still didn't speak.

Donnie's jaw tightened. "I said I'm working, Raph. I don't need an audience."

"You don't need to be a jerk either," Raph fired back immediately. "They were just tryin' to help you."

“I didn’t ask for help!” Donnie snapped, spinning around again. The movement was sharp, agitated, like he couldn’t stay still for more than a second. “Why is that so hard for everyone to understand tonight?!”

Mikey shifted awkwardly near the door, glancing between all of you. “Uh… maybe we all just chill for a sec—”

“Stay out of it, Mikey,” Donnie cut in, not even looking at him.

That only made the tension worse.

Raph’s expression hardened, his stance squaring instinctively. “Nah, you don’t get to talk to us like that,” he said, voice dropping into something more serious. “You’re outta line.”

“I’m busy,” Donnie shot back. “There’s a difference.”

“There ain’t when you start actin’ like this!”

Their voices rose, overlapping now, sharp edges clashing. It wasn’t just about you anymore—it was building into something bigger, something fueled by exhaustion on one side and stubborn pride on the other.

You felt your chest tighten. This wasn’t how this was supposed to go.

You finally stepped forward, your voice coming out more urgent than before. “Hey—hey, stop. Both of you.”

Neither listened.

Raph took another step closer, towering, unyielding. “You think you’re the only one dealin’ with stuff? We’ve all been tryin’ to get you outta here for two days, Donnie!”

“And I’ve been trying to finish something important!” Donnie snapped back. “But apparently that’s impossible with everyone constantly interrupting me!”

“You callin’ them an interruption?” Raph gestured toward you, incredulous. “Really?”

Donnie didn’t hesitate. “Right now? Yes!”

The word hit harder than the first time.

You swallowed, but forced yourself to stay focused. “Okay—okay, that’s enough,” you said, stepping between them despite the way your heart started to pound faster. “You’re both just tired and—”

“I am not tired!” Donnie barked.

“You are,” you insisted, your voice tightening. “You’re exhausted and you’re taking it out on everyone—”

“And you keep pushing like you know better!” he snapped back.

Raph let out a sharp laugh, but there was no humor in it. “Wow. You hear yourself right now?”

Donnie’s grip tightened around the tool in his hand, knuckles tense. “Do you?”

Something shifted then. Subtle—but dangerous.

Raph stepped closer again, too close now, his patience clearly gone. “Say that again.”

“Raph—” Leo warned, stepping forward slightly.

But it was already too late. Donnie moved first. It wasn’t calculated. It wasn’t even fully controlled. It was a sharp, frustrated motion—an arm swinging out, meant to shove Raph back, to create space, to end the confrontation.

But you were in between them. You didn’t even have time to react.

The impact came fast and sudden, knocking into you hard enough to send you stumbling sideways. Pain shot through your shoulder, the force catching you completely off guard.

Everything went quiet. Like the sound had been ripped out of the room.

You barely registered the way your foot slipped on something on the floor, or how you had to catch yourself against the edge of the table to stay upright. Your ears rang faintly, your breath hitching as the shock settled in.

For a moment, no one moved. Then—

“Hey—hey, you okay?” Leo was at your side instantly, one hand steadying your arm, the other hovering near your shoulder like he wasn’t sure where it was safe to touch. His voice was sharp now, focused, all attention on you.

“I—” You swallowed, trying to ground yourself. “I’m okay. I think—just—”

Your shoulder throbbed, but you forced yourself to straighten a little. Across from you, Raph had gone completely still. His gaze slowly shifted from you… to Donnie. And whatever was in his expression now was worse than anger. It was disbelief.

“…You serious right now?” Raph said quietly.

Donnie hadn’t moved. Not since it happened. The tool in his hand hung loosely now, his grip gone slack. His eyes were fixed on you, wide behind his goggles, like his brain was still catching up to what he’d just done.

“I—” he started, but nothing came out.

Raph took a step toward him, slow and deliberate. “You proud of that?” he asked, voice low, controlled in a way that made it more dangerous. “Huh? That what you were goin’ for?”

“No!” Donnie snapped, but it didn’t have the same bite anymore. It sounded… wrong. Shaken. “I wasn’t— I didn’t—”

“You hit them,” Raph cut in.

“I know!” The words came out sharper than intended, but they cracked at the edges.

Silence fell again. Heavy. Thick.

You could see it now—the shift in Donnie. The anger was still there, but it was buried under something else. Something heavier. His shoulders had dropped slightly, the tension turning into something closer to dread.

He looked at you again. Really looked this time. And whatever he saw on your face made his expression falter completely.

“I didn’t mean to,” he said, quieter now. Not defensive. Not sharp. Just… wrong. “I wasn’t— that wasn’t—”

“It happened,” Leo said, cutting in gently but firmly.

Mikey hovered near the door, unusually quiet, his usual energy gone as he looked between all of you. “Maybe we should just… take a break,” he murmured.

Leo nodded slightly, still focused on you. “Yeah. We’re done here for now.”

Raph didn’t argue, but his stare never left Donnie. Not even as he stepped back, giving you space to move. You hesitated for a second. Just a second. Your eyes flickered toward Donnie again. He hadn’t moved from where he stood, like he was rooted to the spot. The guilt was written all over him now, clear as anything you’d ever seen.

But you couldn’t stay. Not right now.

So you let Leo guide you gently toward the door, Mikey moving ahead to clear the way, Raph following behind like a silent guard. No one spoke as you left. The door slid shut with a soft, final sound. And Donnie was left alone in the lab.

Standing in the middle of the mess he’d made—machines still humming, screens still glowing—except now none of it seemed to matter. His hand slowly lowered to his side. His shoulders sank. And for the first time in days, the exhaustion hit him all at once. But he didn’t move. Didn’t go after you. He just stood there… staring at the door. Guilt settling in, heavy and unavoidable.

The walk away from the lab felt longer than it actually was. No one said much at first. Leo kept a steady hand on your arm, guiding you carefully like you might lose your balance at any second, even though you’d already insisted twice that you were fine. Mikey stayed close on your other side, unusually quiet, glancing at you every few seconds like he was waiting for you to suddenly admit you weren’t okay after all. And Raph… Raph walked just behind you, his presence heavy and protective, like he was making sure nothing else could reach you.

By the time you got to the couch, the tension hadn't really eased.

"Sit," Leo said gently, easing you down before you could argue again.

"I can sit on my own, you know," you muttered, but there wasn't much bite behind it.

"Yeah, we know," Mikey added quickly, crouching down in front of you anyway. "We just also know people say 'I'm fine' right before they pass out dramatically."

You huffed a quiet breath, shaking your head a little. "I'm not going to pass out."

Raph crossed his arms, still standing, eyes scanning you like he didn't fully believe that. "He hit you pretty hard."

"It wasn't like that," you said, softer now. "It was an accident."

"That don't make it nothing," Raph muttered.

Leo shot him a brief look, not exactly a warning, but enough to keep things from escalating again. Then his attention shifted back to you, calmer. "Does anything hurt? Shoulder, arm…?"

You rolled your shoulder slightly. It ached, but not enough to make a big deal out of it. "Just a little sore. I'll live."

Mikey leaned closer, squinting like he was trying to diagnose something. "You sure nothing's, like, secretly broken? Because I've seen movies where—"

"Mikey," Leo interrupted, a little firmer this time.

"Right. Not helping. Got it."

A small silence settled again, quieter now, but still carrying the aftermath of everything that had just happened.

You leaned back slightly into the couch, exhaling. "I'm okay. Really."

This time, Leo seemed to accept it, at least enough to ease off a little. Raph didn't look convinced, but he didn't push further either.

A few minutes passed like that.

The tension slowly unwound, bit by bit, replaced by something more tired than anything else. The kind of quiet that comes after something goes wrong.

And then you noticed it. A figure near the lab entrance. You turned your head slightly. Donnie stood there, just outside the doorway, like he hadn't been sure whether he should come out or not. His posture was… off. Shoulders slightly hunched, arms close to himself, fingers fidgeting restlessly like he didn't know what to do with them.

He looked… small. Not physically—but in the way guilt seemed to fold him in on himself. His eyes found you almost immediately. And he froze. Raph noticed a second later.

His expression hardened instantly, and he stepped forward just enough to block the path. "Don't," he said, firm and flat.

Donnie flinched—actually flinched—at the tone. "I just—" he started, voice quieter than you'd ever heard it.

Raph didn't move. "I said don't."

"Raph," you spoke up, your voice cutting through before it could turn into something else again.

He didn't look away from Donnie. "No."

"It's okay," you insisted, a little more firmly this time.

That made him hesitate. You stood up slowly from the couch, ignoring the way Leo instinctively shifted like he was about to stop you. "It's fine," you repeated, softer now.

Raph glanced back at you, conflicted. "You sure?"

You nodded. That was enough. He stepped aside—but not far. Not relaxed. Just… allowing it. Donnie didn't move right away. Like he wasn't sure he was actually allowed to. Then, slowly, he walked closer. Careful. Hesitant.

"I—" He stopped a few steps away from you, hands tightening slightly. "Can we… talk? Alone?"

Leo and Mikey exchanged a quick look. Raph didn't bother hiding his distrust. But you answered before any of them could.

"Yeah," you said simply.

There was a brief pause—like they were debating it—but in the end, Leo gave a small nod. "We'll be right here."

You nodded back, then turned toward Donnie. "Your room?"

He swallowed slightly, then nodded. "Yeah."

The walk there was quiet. Not tense in the same way as before—but heavy. Donnie stayed half a step behind you the whole time, like he didn't feel like he had the right to walk beside you.

When you stepped into his room, he closed the door gently behind you. And then—

It all came out.

“I’m sorry—I’m so, so sorry, I didn’t mean to, I swear I didn’t, I would never hurt you, I wasn’t thinking, I haven’t slept and that’s not— that’s not an excuse, I know it’s not, I just—”

He didn’t stop. The words tumbled over each other, fast and uneven, like if he paused for even a second he wouldn’t be able to keep going. His hands moved as he spoke, restless, anxious, like he was trying to physically push the guilt out of himself.

“I shouldn’t have snapped at you, I shouldn’t have yelled, and then I just— I lost control and I— I hate that I did that, I hate that I hurt you, I would never do that to you, ever—”

“Donnie—”

“I mean it, I would never—”

“Donnie.”

He stopped. Just like that. Like the word had snapped him back into the room. His breathing was uneven, chest rising and falling too fast, eyes fixed on you with something raw and terrified sitting behind them.

You softened. “It’s okay,” you said gently.

He shook his head immediately. “No, it’s not.”

“It is,” you insisted, your voice steady. “You were exhausted. You hadn’t slept in two days, Donnie. You weren’t thinking straight.”

“That doesn’t make it okay,” he said quickly. “That doesn’t— I still did it.”

“I know,” you said. “And I’m telling you I understand.”

He looked at you like that almost made it worse. Because the guilt didn’t leave. If anything, it deepened, settling heavier in his expression.

You sighed softly, stepping a little closer.

“I mean it,” you added. “I’m not mad at you.”

He searched your face, like he didn’t quite believe that. So you gave him something he would understand.

“Okay,” you said, tilting your head slightly. “Deal.”

He blinked, thrown off. “Deal?”

“You stop beating yourself up over this,” you said, “and I forgive you.”

His brows pulled together. “You already—”

“And,” you cut in lightly, “you go to sleep.”

He stared at you. "…Sleep."

"Yes, Donnie. Sleep."

He hesitated, clearly torn. You could practically see the argument forming in his head—the projects, the work, the unfinished things. Then he looked at you again. At your shoulder. At the place where he knew he'd hit you. And that was it.

"…Okay," he said quietly.

You smiled a little. "Okay?"

He nodded. "Okay. I'll… I'll sleep."

"And take a break."

"Yes."

"And not sneak back to the lab in twenty minutes."

"I won't."

You narrowed your eyes slightly. "I'm holding you to that."

"I know." There was a small pause. Then, softer this time, "I'm still really sorry."

You rolled your eyes a little—but there was no real annoyance in it. "I know you are."

Before he could start again, you leaned forward and pressed a quick, light peck to his cheek. It caught him completely off guard.

You pulled back just as quickly, already turning toward the door. "Get some sleep, Donnie."

He blinked, still processing. You opened the door, glancing back at him with a small, playful look. "And I better not see you out of this room for at least… seventeen hours."

"Seventeen—?"

"Minimum," you added, already stepping out.

The door closed behind you before he could argue. And for the first time in days, Donnie didn't go back to the lab. He just stood there for a moment… then slowly sat down. And finally—finally—let himself rest.

Chapter 29: “CHEMISTRY PROJECT” —ft. MM Donatello

Chapter Summary

[you two get paired for a chemistry project]

It still felt unreal sometimes—walking through the halls like everything was normal, like the city hadn’t almost been wrecked by a mutant kaiju just weeks ago. People talked to them now. Laughed with them. Took selfies when the teachers weren’t looking. And somehow, even with all of that, Donnie still stood out.

Not in the “cool new kid” way his brothers leaned into, but in that quiet, slightly off-beat orbit he carried around himself. Head tilted down at his tablet, fingers always moving, brain clearly ten steps ahead of whatever class you were all stuck in. He didn’t try to fit in—he just… existed. And somehow, that worked.

You, on the other hand, were barely surviving chemistry.

“So—pairs for the project,” your teacher announced, already scribbling names across the board without mercy. No negotiation. No pleading. Just fate being assigned in dry-erase marker.

You weren’t paying attention at first. You were too busy trying to remember the difference between molarity and… whatever the other one was. They all blurred together. Until—

“Donatello and—”

Your name.

Your stomach dropped so fast it almost hurt. You turned your head slowly, like maybe if you delayed it long enough, it would change. It didn’t. Donnie was already looking at you, pushing his glasses up with one finger, expression neutral but focused.

“Oh,” he said simply, like he’d just been told the weather. “Okay.”

Okay?? That was all he had to say about being paired with someone who had nearly set a worksheet on fire last week?

After class, he didn’t hesitate. He walked straight up to you, tablet already in hand, pulling up something that looked way too advanced to be legal in a high school project.

“So, we should start today,” he said. Straight to the point. No small talk. “I’ve already got a few ideas. We could test reaction rates under different catalysts, or—actually, wait, no, temperature variables might give us cleaner data…”

You blinked at him. You understood maybe… three words.

"…right," you said, trying to sound like you weren't completely lost. "Yeah. Sure."

He paused then, actually looking at you properly for a second. Not judging—just analyzing, like he was trying to calibrate something.

"…You're coming over, right?" he asked. "It's easier to set everything up at my place. I've got equipment."

Equipment. Right. Because of course he did.

"Yeah," you said, a little too quickly. "Yeah, I'll come."

He nodded, satisfied. "Cool. I'll text you the time."

And just like that, it was decided.

…

Hours later, you sat on the edge of your bed, staring at your phone like it had personally betrayed you.

Donnie: 6:00. I'll meet you by the entrance near the alley. It's… not exactly obvious.

Another message followed almost immediately.

Donnie: Bring a notebook. And maybe gloves if you have them. Safety first.

Of course. Gloves. Safety. Words that implied you'd be handling things that required knowing what you were doing.

Your chest tightened.

You looked around your room like it might suddenly offer you answers. Notes scattered across your desk—half-finished, half-wrong. Diagrams you didn't understand. Terms that refused to stick no matter how many times you reread them.

He was expecting… a partner.

Someone who could keep up. Someone who wouldn't slow him down. And you? You didn't even know where to start.

You could already picture it. You showing up, standing there useless while he did everything. Asking dumb questions. Messing something up. Watching that subtle shift in his expression when he realized he got stuck with the worst possible option.

Your stomach twisted. Another message lit up your screen.

Donnie: Also, don't freak out when you get there. It's not gross. Well—okay, it is, but like, in a controlled way.

Despite everything, you let out a small, nervous breath of a laugh. Then it faded.

6:00.

It was already 5:47. You didn't move. Instead, you stared at the clock, your thoughts getting louder, heavier, meaner.

You're going to mess it up.
He doesn't need you there.
You're just going to slow him down.
He'd probably do better without you.

Your phone buzzed again. You didn't pick it up this time.

Minutes passed.
6:02.
6:10.
6:23.

Each one made it worse. He was probably waiting. Checking his phone. Maybe even pacing. Or maybe he'd already figured it out—that you weren't coming. That you weren't worth waiting for.

You pulled your knees up to your chest, pressing your forehead against them, trying to quiet the noise in your head. It didn't work. Your phone lit up again. You didn't open it. Because if you did, it would make it real. And somehow, pretending—just for a little longer—that you hadn't already disappointed him felt easier than facing it head-on.

So you stayed there. Overthinking. Replaying everything. Letting the silence grow heavier with every second you didn't answer.

…

The next day felt heavier than it should have. Nothing had changed—same classrooms, same teachers, same low hum of chatter filling the halls—but everything sat wrong in your chest, like you were carrying something everyone else could somehow see. You kept your head down more than usual, focusing too hard on things that didn't matter just to avoid the one thing that did.

Donnie.

You spotted him the moment you walked into chemistry, like your brain was wired to find him whether you wanted it to or not. He was already in his seat, tablet propped up, tapping away at something with that same quiet concentration. For a second—just a second—you wondered if he'd look up, if he'd immediately notice you, if he'd say something.

He didn't. Or maybe he did, and you just weren't brave enough to check.

You slid into your seat, eyes glued to your desk, pretending to care about the faint scratches on the surface, about the faded ink marks from past students. Anything but turning your head.

Anything but meeting his gaze and seeing… what? Disappointment? Annoyance? That subtle shift you'd been dreading?

The class went on like usual, but you barely absorbed any of it. Every time the teacher mentioned the project, your stomach twisted tighter. Every time you felt even the slightest movement from Donnie's direction, your shoulders stiffened without meaning to.

He didn't say a word to you. And somehow, that almost felt worse.

By the time the final bell rang, you were already halfway packed. You moved quickly, stuffing everything into your bag like speed alone could get you out of there before anything happened. Before he could stop you. Before you had to face it.

You almost made it. You were already stepping out into the hallway, merging with the flow of students heading for the exit, when—

"Hey."

Your heart dropped. You didn't even have to turn around to know it was him. There was something about his voice—calm, direct, a little too precise—that made it unmistakable.

You stopped anyway. Slowly, you turned, forcing yourself to look at him, even if it only lasted a second before your gaze slipped somewhere over his shoulder.

He was holding his phone loosely in one hand, glasses slightly crooked like he'd adjusted them too many times already. His expression wasn't angry. Not even close. If anything, it was… searching.

"You didn't come yesterday," he said, not accusing—just stating it, like a fact he was trying to understand. "Everything alright?"

The question landed softer than you expected. Too soft.

"Yeah," you answered quickly, too quickly. "Yeah, I just—something came up. Family stuff."

The lie felt thin the moment it left your mouth.

Donnie didn't react right away. He just looked at you for a second longer than was comfortable, his eyes narrowing ever so slightly—not in suspicion, but in analysis, like he was running your words through some internal system and not liking the output.

"…Right," he said finally.

He didn't call you out. Didn't push. Didn't even question it. But he didn't believe you. That much was obvious.

He shifted his weight slightly, glancing down at his phone before looking back up at you again, tone returning to that practical, forward-moving rhythm.

“You can still come today,” he said. “I’ve already set some stuff up, so we can just pick up where I left off. It’ll be faster that way.”

There it was again. That assumption. That expectation that you’d be there, that you were part of this, that you weren’t… a problem to work around.

You nodded before your brain could catch up. “Yeah. Yeah, I’ll come.”

Another lie.

He gave a small nod, like that settled it. “Okay. Same place.”

And just like that, he stepped back, letting the flow of students carry him in the opposite direction.

You stood there for a moment longer, the noise of the hallway rushing back in around you, your grip tightening slightly on your bag strap.

You already knew. You weren’t going.

…

The fluorescent lights of the grocery store buzzed faintly overhead, too bright, too artificial, making everything feel sharper than it should. You trailed behind your mother, barely paying attention to what she was saying as she compared labels and reached for items on the shelves.

Your phone felt heavier than usual in your pocket. You didn’t need to check it to know. Still, you did.

Donnie: You on your way?

A few minutes later—

Donnie: I adjusted the setup so it’s easier to follow.

Then—

Donnie: Also I labeled everything. Like, aggressively labeled. You can’t miss it.

You swallowed, locking your phone and slipping it back into your pocket without replying. You told yourself you’d answer in a minute. Then another. Then… later.

You hovered near the cart, pretending to be interested in a row of cereal boxes you weren’t reading, your thoughts louder than the store around you.

Just don’t go again.
It’ll be easier.
He’ll figure it out.

Your phone buzzed once more. You ignored it. And then—

“Hey.”

Your entire body went still. That voice again. But closer. Too close.

You turned slowly, and there he was. Donnie stood a few feet away, phone still in his hand, like he’d tracked you down using it—which, honestly, wouldn’t have been surprising. His hoodie looked slightly out of place under the store lighting, and there was a faint crease between where his brows should be, like he’d been thinking too hard on the way here.

For a second, neither of you spoke. Then your mother glanced between the two of you, polite curiosity taking over.

“Oh—hi,” she said, offering a small smile. “You must be a friend from school.”

Donnie blinked, like he hadn’t fully prepared for this part of the interaction, but he recovered quickly, straightening just a bit.

“Yeah. Hi,” he said, voice polite, a little more measured than usual. “We’re partners for a chemistry project.”

Your mother’s expression softened, clearly pleased. “Ah, that’s nice. It’s good to work together on those things.”

You stood there, awkward and quiet, heat creeping up your neck as the situation settled heavier by the second. You couldn’t even bring yourself to look at him properly now.

“Well,” your mother continued after a moment, glancing at you, then back at him, “I still have a few things to grab. I’ll meet you at home, alright?”

You looked up slightly, surprised. “Yeah,” you muttered.

She gave you a knowing look—not prying, just understanding enough—before pushing the cart further down the aisle, leaving the two of you in a pocket of space that suddenly felt too small.

Silence settled in. You braced yourself. For questions. For frustration. For something.

But Donnie didn’t start with any of that. He shifted his phone into his pocket, looking at you properly now, his voice quieter, stripped of the usual analytical edge.

“Are you okay?”

The question caught you off guard. Not why didn’t you come. Not what happened. Just that.

You hesitated, your fingers curling slightly at your sides. “I’m fine,” you said automatically.

He didn’t react. Didn’t accept it, didn’t reject it. He just held your gaze for a second longer, like he was waiting for something more honest to surface.

“If you’re not,” he added, just as calm, “you can tell me.”

Something in your chest tightened. It would've been easier if he was annoyed. If he was frustrated. If he gave you something solid to push against. But this? This made it harder.

You looked away first. "I just…" you started, your voice quieter now, less certain. "I didn't want to mess it up."

He tilted his head slightly.

"The project," you clarified quickly, words starting to trip over each other now that they were out. "You're good at this stuff. Like—really good. And I'm not. I barely understand anything we're doing, and I just thought… if I went, I'd just slow you down or ruin something or make it worse, and it'd be easier if you just did it yourself."

The words hung there, heavier than you expected. You finally risked a glance at him. And for a second, he just stared at you. Processing. Then—

He laughed. Not harshly. Not mockingly. Just… a short, surprised sound, like what you said hadn't even been on his radar.

"That's what you were worried about?" he asked, genuine disbelief slipping through.

Donnie's reaction didn't carry even a trace of irritation, which somehow made the knot in your chest tighten more instead of loosening. He shook his head slightly, pushing his glasses back into place with a small, habitual motion, like he needed the adjustment to organize his thoughts.

"That's… not a problem," he said, tone matter-of-fact, but not dismissive. "Like, at all. If you don't get something, I can just explain it. That's kind of the point of working together." He paused, glancing at you to make sure you were actually listening before continuing. "We're supposed to do the project as a team. That means I adapt too. I'm not expecting you to suddenly know everything."

You blinked, caught off guard by how simple he made it sound.

"I never said it had to be super technical," he went on, a little more animated now, his hands starting to move slightly as he talked. "Honestly, I was already overcomplicating it in my head, which is… yeah, that's on me." A small, self-aware shrug followed. "But I wanted to run ideas with you. Like, actual brainstorming. Different perspectives make it better. That's how this works."

That's how this works.

The words settled heavily. Because in your head, it had never worked like that. It had always been about not falling behind, not messing up, not being the weak link. And yet here he was, talking about adjusting, about listening, about… including you.

Your shoulders dropped just a little, tension slipping out without you realizing it. But it left something else behind instead. Embarrassment. Guilt.

“I just… assumed,” you admitted quietly, your voice not quite steady. “I thought you’d get stuck with me and regret it.”

He frowned slightly at that, not in confusion—more like he didn’t like the idea itself.

“That’s not how I see it,” he said, a bit firmer this time.

The weight of everything you’d done—the ignoring, the lies, the way you’d avoided him—pressed in all at once, making it hard to stay standing there under the harsh store lights. You shifted awkwardly, glancing toward the end of the aisle.

“Can we… go somewhere else?” you asked, a little hesitant. “It’s kinda loud here.”

He followed your gaze, then nodded once without hesitation. “Yeah. Sure.”

…

The air outside felt different. Cooler, quieter, like it gave your thoughts more space to settle instead of bouncing around uncontrollably. You didn’t go far—just a small park a few minutes away, tucked between buildings, with a couple of benches and the faint sound of leaves moving in the breeze.

You sat down first, hands resting in your lap, fingers fidgeting without purpose. Donnie stayed standing for a second, like he was deciding whether to sit or pace, then eventually dropped onto the bench beside you, leaving just enough space to not crowd you.

For a moment, neither of you spoke.

You took a breath.

“I’m sorry,” you said, the words coming out more quietly than you expected. “For yesterday. And today. I shouldn’t have just… not shown up.” Your gaze dropped to your hands. “It was cowardly.”

There. You said it.

Donnie didn’t react immediately. He leaned back slightly, looking up at the sky for a second before answering, like he was choosing his words instead of just letting them spill out.

“I don’t think it was cowardly,” he said eventually. “I think you were overwhelmed.”

You glanced at him, surprised.

“New stuff can look… bigger than it actually is,” he continued, a small shrug following. “Especially if you already feel like you’re behind. Your brain kind of fills in the worst-case scenario before you even try.”

That hit a little too accurately.

He turned his head slightly, meeting your eyes again, expression more serious now—not intense, just focused in that very him way.

“But,” he added, “I do need you to trust me a bit.”

Your breath caught slightly.

“If you don’t understand something, you can ask,” he said, straightforward, no hesitation. “Like—anything. It’s not annoying, it’s not slowing me down. That’s literally part of the process.” His tone softened just a fraction. “And I’d rather you ask than just disappear.”

The last part wasn’t harsh, but it landed.

You nodded slowly, taking that in.

“I just… didn’t want to look stupid,” you admitted.

He tilted his head slightly at that, like he was examining the idea.

“You won’t,” he said simply. “You’ll just look like someone learning.”

There wasn’t any sugarcoating in it. No dramatic reassurance. Just… truth, stated plainly.

And somehow, that helped more.

A small, nervous breath left you, something in your chest finally easing in a way it hadn’t since yesterday. You didn’t feel completely better—not yet—but it wasn’t as heavy anymore.

Donnie shifted slightly beside you, glancing at his phone for a second before looking back at you.

“So,” he said, tone returning to something a bit lighter, “you can still come over. If you want. We can start from zero this time. No complicated setup, no weird variables. Just… basics.”

You hesitated. Not because you wanted to say no. But because this time, you knew saying yes actually meant something.

You looked at him properly now, really looked—at the way he was watching you, not impatient, not pushing, just… waiting.

“…Yeah,” you said, and this time it came out different. “I want to.”

A small shift happened in his expression—not a big smile, not anything exaggerated, just a subtle ease, like something had clicked into place.

“Okay,” he said, nodding once. “Cool.”

You let out a small breath, almost a laugh, the tension finally breaking enough to let something lighter slip through.

“And you’re actually gonna explain things?” you asked, a hint of teasing creeping in despite yourself.

He gave you a look—half incredulous, half amused. “I literally just said that,” he replied.

“Just making sure.”

“I can also draw diagrams,” he added, like that was a selling point. “And I have color-coded notes.”

That got a real laugh out of you.

“Alright, okay,” you said, shaking your head slightly. “Now I’m actually curious.”

“Good,” he said, standing up from the bench and adjusting his hoodie. “That’s step one.”

You stood up too, grabbing your bag, and for the first time since all of this started, the idea of going to his place didn’t feel like walking into a disaster waiting to happen. It felt like… starting something. Together.

Chapter 30: “COOL RIDE” —ft. MM Leonardo

The “mission” was already going wrong before it even started.

“You guys are acting like this is some elite ninja operation,” you muttered, watching Leo dramatically point at a badly drawn map on Donnie’s tablet. “We’re literally just trying to follow a guy to a warehouse.”

“It’s called strategy,” Leo said immediately, trying way too hard to sound cool. “A leader needs tactical precision.”

“You watched one documentary.”

“It was TWO documentaries.”

From the couch, Mikey shoved an entire handful of cheese puffs into his mouth. “Bro’s been insufferable all week.”

“I have always been like this,” Leo defended.

“Exactly,” Raph said.

You snorted quietly, and Leo’s eyes flicked toward you almost instantly. That was the problem lately. Every time you laughed, looked at him, spoke to him, breathed in his general direction—his brain completely short-circuited. And he hated that everyone was starting to notice. Especially Donnie.

Donnie adjusted his glasses with the most evil little smirk imaginable. “Interesting. Leo volunteering to pair up with Y/N.”

Leo nearly choked. “WHAT? Dude, we literally just need balanced teams.”

“Sure” Donnie replied flatly.

You looked between them suspiciously. “…Am I missing something?”

“NO,” Leo answered way too fast.

Raph raised a brow. “You sounded guilty.”

“I SOUND NORMAL.”

“You sound like a substitute teacher trying not to cry.”

Leo threw a pillow at him. Splinter sighed from across the room without even looking up from his show. “Please leave before one of you damages my television.”

That was how you somehow ended up walking through the city beside Leo twenty minutes later while the others split off elsewhere. Nighttime in New York buzzed around you loudly —cars honking, music blasting from open windows, neon signs flickering over wet pavement. Leo walked beside you with his arms swinging, trying to act relaxed.

Trying being the key word. Because internally? Internally, this dude was losing his mind.

You looked good tonight. Like, unfairly good. Not even in some dramatic movie way either —you just existed near him and suddenly he forgot how to function properly. He accidentally walked into a parking meter.

You stared at him.

“I meant to do that.”

“That makes it worse.”

“Yeah. Yeah, probably.”

You laughed again, and Leo physically had to stop himself from smiling too hard. God. This was bad.

“So,” you said after a moment, “what exactly’s the plan here, fearless leader?”

Leo straightened immediately at the title. “Okay, so according to Donnie’s intel, this guy’s delivering tech parts to some black-market place near the docks. We follow him, see who he meets with, maybe grab information—”

A loud engine suddenly roared somewhere nearby. Both of you turned. A guy wearing a helmet had just parked a motorcycle beside a convenience store before running inside.

Your eyes widened a little. “Okay, that thing looks dangerous.”

Leo looked at the bike. Then looked at you. Then back at the bike. And unfortunately for everyone involved, an absolutely terrible idea entered his brain.

You noticed the expression instantly. “No.”

“What? I didn’t even say anything.”

“You have the face.”

“I do not have a face for bad ideas.”

“You absolutely do.”

Leo stepped closer to the motorcycle, trying to appear smooth and confident despite having literally never driven one before in his life.

“I’m just saying,” he started casually, “we could get to the docks faster.”

“Leo.”

“And motorcycles are objectively cool.”

“Leo.”

“And I’m naturally athletic, so honestly, how hard could it be?”

You crossed your arms. “Have you ever ridden one?”

He paused. “…Define ridden.”

You stared at him in disbelief. But Leo flashed you a grin anyway—cocky, reckless, determined to impress you even if it killed him.

“Trust me,” he said, hopping onto the bike like he totally knew what he was doing. “I got this.”

“You are absolutely going to kill us,” you informed Leo as he struggled to figure out how the motorcycle even started.

“I am deeply offended by your lack of faith.”

“You pressed the horn three times.”

“That was tactical.”

You watched him fumble with the handles for another few seconds before sighing dramatically and climbing onto the back seat anyway. Leo tried very, very hard to act normal about that. He failed instantly. Because now you were right behind him.

Like—right behind him. Close enough that he could feel your knees brush against his sides when you adjusted yourself on the bike, and suddenly his brain forgot every martial arts lesson he had ever learned.

“Oh my god,” he muttered quietly to himself.

“What?”

“Nothing.”

“You said that out loud.”

“No I didn’t.”

“You literally did.”

Leo cleared his throat aggressively and reached for the extra helmet hanging from the handlebars. He turned slightly and handed it to you.

“You wear it.”

You blinked. “What about you?”

“I don’t need one.”

“You definitely do.”

“Nah. My skull’s built different.”

“That is not how helmets work.”

“I’m a ninja mutant turtle. I think I transcend road safety laws.”

“You are SO getting brain damage.”

Leo snorted. “Pretty sure I already have some.”

You rolled your eyes but put the helmet on anyway, tightening the strap under your chin while Leo tried not to stare at you too obviously. He was doing a terrible job.

The second you finished adjusting it, he looked away so fast it almost gave him whiplash.

“Okay,” he announced, gripping the handles with way too much confidence. “Ready?”

“No.”

“Perfect.”

Before you could protest further, the motorcycle suddenly lurched forward.

You immediately grabbed onto his shell. “LEO—”

“I GOT IT.”

“You almost hit a mailbox!”

“I MISJUDGED THE DISTANCE.”

“You drove directly AT IT.”

“But I DIDN’T hit it.”

“That is NOT reassuring!”

Somehow—through pure luck, panic, and probably divine intervention—Leo managed to stabilize the bike as it sped through the streets. And annoyingly? He actually started getting the hang of it.

The night air rushed past both of you, cold and loud, neon lights streaking around the city while cars blurred beside you. Leo’s earlier panic slowly shifted into smug confidence.

“See?” he yelled over the engine. “Natural talent!”

“You almost died three separate times!”

“BUT I DIDN’T.”

You groaned loudly behind him. Then suddenly—

The road ahead slanted sharply upward where part of a broken ramp connected between levels of the street.

Your eyes widened immediately. “Oh, absolutely not.”

Leo leaned forward slightly. “Shortcut.”

“That is NOT a shortcut, that is a death wish!”

“There’s no time to go around!”

“There is definitely time to go around!”

Leo looked ahead dramatically like he was in some action movie nobody asked him to star in. “We commit to the bit.”

“LEONARDO—”

“Hold tight!”

The motorcycle accelerated. Your soul practically left your body.

“LEO WAITWAITWAIT—”

The second the bike hit the incline, panic completely took over your instincts. You grabbed onto him hard. Arms wrapped tightly around his middle. Chest pressed against his shell. Face buried against his shoulder as the motorcycle practically launched into the air for one horrifying second.

And Leo—

Leo nearly ascended spiritually. Every single thought in his brain vanished instantly. He could feel your grip tightening around him, hear your panicked breathing near his ear, and suddenly this dude was experiencing emotions so intense he almost forgot he was currently airborne.

This was it. This was the greatest moment of his life.

The bike slammed back onto the street with a violent bounce. You made a strangled noise into his shoulder. “I HATE YOU.”

Leo, meanwhile, was smiling so hard it physically hurt. “…Worth it.”

By the time the motorcycle finally screeched into an empty alley near the docks, your lifespan had probably shortened by at least ten years. The engine died with one last rumble.

Silence. For a few seconds, neither of you moved. Then you slowly lifted your head from Leo's shoulder.

"…I saw heaven."

Leo was still gripping the handlebars, trying—and failing—not to grin like an idiot. "You screamed my full name three times."

"Because I thought we were going to explode!"

"But we didn't."

"You DROVE OFF A RAMP."

"And landed it."

"You are never touching a vehicle again."

Leo laughed breathlessly, finally climbing off the bike first. His feet hit the pavement before he turned back toward you almost immediately.

The stupid thing was—he looked genuinely concerned now. Not teasing. Not showing off. Just worried.

"You okay?" he asked softer.

You were still sitting frozen on the motorcycle, hands gripping the seat tightly. "I think my soul is still somewhere back there."

"Okay, yeah, that one might've been a little intense."

"A little?"

"In my defense," he said, raising his hands slightly, "it looked cooler in my head."

"That explains literally everything about you."

Leo snorted. Then his expression shifted again when he noticed you hesitate trying to get off the bike. The adrenaline had worn off enough for your legs to feel shaky now.

"Oh—hold on."

Before you could argue, Leo stepped closer carefully, one hand lightly holding the motorcycle steady while the other reached toward you. It was surprisingly gentle.

"C'mon," he murmured. "I got you."

You blinked a little at the sudden softness in his voice. For all his dramatic confidence and chaotic energy, Leo always got weirdly careful whenever you looked even slightly uncomfortable.

You placed your hand in his. His brain immediately short-circuited. He hoped it didn't show on his face.

Slowly, Leo helped guide you off the motorcycle, keeping one arm around your waist to steady you when your legs wobbled against the pavement.

"There," he said quietly. "See? Alive."

"Barely."

"You're being dramatic."

"You literally turned New York traffic into Mario Kart."

"That is honestly the nicest thing anyone's ever said to me."

You let out a weak laugh despite yourself, though your grip on his arm. Leo noticed immediately. And because this was Leonardo? His entire chest basically melted.

"You're still shaking," he said.

"I hate heights."

"We were like… ten feet off the ground."

"That is enough feet!"

"Fair."

For once, he didn't joke after that. Instead, Leo looked down at you for a moment, the city lights reflecting faintly across his face while distant traffic echoed somewhere beyond the alley.

Then, quieter this time: "Hey." You looked up at him. His expression softened completely. "I wouldn't let anything happen to you."

The words came out naturally. Instantly. No fake cool-guy attitude attached. And honestly? That probably made them hit harder.

Leo seemed to realize what he'd just said about half a second too late. His eyes widened slightly. Internal panic. Abort mission. Abort mission immediately.

So naturally, he made it worse. "I mean—not like you can't handle yourself! You totally can. Obviously. You're scary sometimes actually. Like emotionally terrifying. But I just meant if something DID happen, then I'd— y'know— do ninja stuff."

You stared at him for a second. Then burst out laughing.

Leo groaned loudly and dragged a hand down his face. "Why am I like this?"

"I don't know," you admitted between laughs, "but it's kinda funny."

And somehow, even after nearly dying on a motorcycle five minutes ago, hearing you laugh like that still made Leo feel invincible.

Chapter 31: “SAVIOUR” —ft. BAYVERSE Raphael

Chapter Summary

[he picks you up from a party you didn’t even wanna be at]

The music is too loud.

Not in a fun way, not in a “lose yourself in it” kind of way—just loud enough to crawl under your skin and stay there. The bass vibrates through the floor, through your shoes, up your legs, like it’s trying to shake something loose inside you. People are laughing, shouting over each other, bodies pressed too close, drinks sloshing, lights flashing in colors that make everything feel slightly unreal.

You weren’t even supposed to enjoy it. You knew that from the start. You only came because your friend begged you to. And now? Now she’s halfway across the room, pinned against a wall, making out with some guy whose name you didn’t even catch.

You stand there for a moment longer, holding your cup like it might give you a reason to stay. It doesn’t. No one notices you. No one calls your name. No one cares if you’re there or not.

That’s when the feeling settles in—quiet, heavy, familiar. Out of place.

You exhale slowly, setting the drink down on the nearest surface without even finishing it. There’s no scene, no dramatic goodbye. You just… slip out. Through the hallway, past strangers who barely glance at you, and out the front door into the night air.

The difference hits immediately. Cool. Quiet. Real.

You breathe in deeper this time, like you’ve just surfaced from underwater. The muffled music still leaks out from the house behind you, but it’s distant now, manageable.

Your fingers move almost automatically, pulling your phone out. You hesitate for half a second. Then you type.

“Hey… you busy?”

The reply comes faster than you expect.

“Depends. You okay?”

You huff a small breath through your nose, something softer than a laugh.

“At a party. Not really my thing. Can you pick me up?”

There's a pause this time. Not long—just enough to make you shift your weight from one foot to the other. Then:

"Send location."

You do. Another pause.

"Be there in 15."

Simple. Direct. That's him. And somehow, that's enough to make your shoulders loosen just a little.

You don't go back inside. Instead, you walk a bit down the street, away from the noise and the crowd of people spilling out onto the lawn. You find a quieter spot near the curb, lit by a flickering streetlamp, and wait.

Minutes pass. Cars drive by. A couple laughs as they stumble past you. Somewhere in the distance, a siren wails and fades.

And then—

You hear it. Low. Powerful. Distinct. A motorbike engine. It grows louder, closer, until it rounds the corner and comes into view—black, heavy, unmistakably his. The bike slows as it approaches you, the engine rumbling like a living thing beneath him.

Raphael.

Even in the dim light, he's impossible to miss. Massive frame hunched slightly over the bike, red bandana tails flicking behind him with the movement, muscles shifting under his gear like it's nothing. He handles the machine like it weighs half of what it actually does.

He pulls up right in front of you and cuts the engine. Silence settles in again, but this time it feels… different. Safer. Raph turns his head toward you, eyes scanning you quickly—checking, always checking.

"You good?"

His voice is rough, naturally deep, but there's something softer under it tonight. Something that only really shows when it's just the two of you.

You nod. "Yeah. Just… didn't wanna stay."

He studies you for another second, like he's deciding whether to push or let it go. He lets it go.

"Yeah," he mutters, reaching behind him. "Figures. Parties like that? Not your scene, huh, baby?"

The nickname lands warm, familiar.

You shake your head slightly. “Not really.”

“Didn’t think so.”

He grabs a helmet and holds it out to you. It looks almost comically small in his hand.

“Here.”

You take it, fingers brushing briefly against his. His hand is warm—always warm—and rough in a way that feels grounding instead of harsh. He watches you as you put it on, adjusting the strap without saying anything for a moment. Then, quieter:

“You text me sooner next time, doll. Ain’t gotta stay somewhere you don’t wanna be.”

There’s no judgment in it. No teasing. Just… certainty. Like it’s obvious to him. Like you matter that much.

You nod again, softer this time. “Okay.”

He shifts slightly on the bike, making space.

“C’mere.” You move closer, and he gestures toward the front of the seat. “Sit in front. Easier.”

It makes sense. He’s huge—there’s barely room otherwise. You climb on carefully, settling in front of him. The heat of him is immediate at your back, solid and steady, like a wall that breathes.

For a second, neither of you moves. Then his arms come forward—on either side of you—to grip the handlebars. You’re naturally pulled just a bit closer into him, your back brushing against his plastron. Secure.

“Comfortable?” he asks, voice lower now, closer to your ear.

You swallow lightly, nodding. “Yeah.”

“Good.”

There’s a brief pause, and then you feel it—his hand, just for a second, resting lightly at your side. Not gripping. Not holding.

Just… there. Checking.

You glance down at it, then back ahead. He pulls it away after a moment, like he’s satisfied.

“Aight,” he murmurs. “Let’s get you outta here.”

The engine roars back to life beneath you both, vibrating through your body again—but this time, it’s not overwhelming. It’s grounding. Different.

And as the bike starts to move, you don’t feel out of place anymore. Not even a little.

The city blurs around you. Streetlights stretch into golden lines, wind pressing gently against your clothes as the bike cuts through the night. The noise from the party fades completely, replaced by the steady growl of the engine and the quiet rhythm of Raph's breathing behind you.

It's strange how fast your mood shifts. Ten minutes ago, everything felt wrong. Too loud, too crowded, too… not you. Now? Now you're leaning back just a little more than necessary, letting your shoulder blades rest against him. He doesn't comment on it. Doesn't tease. He just adjusts slightly so you sit more comfortably, one arm shifting just enough to keep you steady without making a big deal out of it.

That's how he is with you. Big presence. Careful hands.

You stay like that for a while, just riding through the city, until the thought slips out before you can overthink it.

"Raph?"

"Yeah, baby?"

His voice is close, almost swallowed by the wind, but you hear it clearly. You hesitate for half a second. Then:

"…Can I stay with you tonight?"

There's no immediate answer. Not because he's unsure—just because he processes things quietly sometimes. You rush to explain, a little softer now.

"I just… don't feel like going home yet."

A beat. Then you feel it—his chest shifting slightly as he exhales.

"Yeah," he says, simple as that. "Course you can."

No questions. No teasing. Like it was never even in doubt.

Your shoulders drop a little more, tension you didn't even realize you were holding finally easing out of you. He taps lightly against your side with two fingers, a small signal.

"Hold on."

The bike speeds up slightly, turning off into a more familiar route. The streets get quieter, darker, more hidden—the kind of paths most people don't even know exist. But you do. Because he's shown you.

…

The entrance to the lair is as discreet as always, tucked away where no one would think to look. He parks the bike smoothly, cutting the engine, and the sudden silence wraps around you again.

“Careful,” he mutters as you climb off.

You hand him the helmet, and he sets it aside without much thought. His eyes flick over you again—quick check, automatic.

“C’mon.”

The walk inside is familiar. Dim tunnels, the faint echo of dripping water, the low hum of tech somewhere deeper in the lair. It’s quieter than usual tonight.

“No one around?” you ask softly.

Raph shrugs one shoulder. “Donnie’s probably buried in his lab. Leo’s… doin’ leader stuff, I dunno. Mikey might be out or passed out.”

A pause.

“Either way, they ain’t gonna bother us.”

There’s something almost protective in the way he says it. Like he’s already decided this time is yours.

His room is exactly how you remember it—dim, a little rough around the edges, but unmistakably his. There’s weight to it. Solid things. Minimal clutter compared to Donnie, but not empty either. The second you step in, something in you just… gives out. You don’t even bother being graceful about it. You walk straight to the bed and drop onto it face-first with a heavy thump, arms spreading out as you let out a long, dramatic groan.

“Ugh—”

The mattress dips slightly under your weight, and you turn your head to the side, voice muffled.

“I don’t even know why I said yes to that damn party…”

There’s a quiet beat behind you. Then a soft huff—almost a chuckle.

“Told you,” Raph says, kicking the door closed behind him. “Ain’t your kinda thing.”

You roll onto your back, staring up at the ceiling. “I know. I just didn’t wanna be a bad friend.”

He walks over, slower now, less guarded than usual.

“You weren’t,” he says simply. “You showed up. That’s enough.”

There’s no over-explaining. No fluff. Just his version of reassurance—straightforward and grounded.

The bed shifts again. He lowers himself beside you carefully—always careful, even though you've told him a hundred times he doesn't have to be. One arm props him up slightly at first, like he's still giving you space to change your mind.

You don't. If anything, you shift a little closer. That's all the permission he needs.

Raph exhales quietly and lets himself settle more fully, one arm moving around you—slow, deliberate, like he's handling something fragile. His hand rests against your side first, then pulls you in just enough so you're tucked comfortably against him.

Warm. Solid. Safe.

You let out a softer sigh this time, the tension melting out of you completely as you relax into him.

"Better?" he murmurs.

"Yeah…"

Your voice is quieter now, almost sleepy.

There's a small pause, and then he adjusts again, shifting so you're more comfortably nestled against his plastron. His chin dips slightly, almost brushing the top of your head. It's… gentle. Almost ridiculously so, considering him.

You snort faintly, the sound breaking the quiet.

"You're such a softie."

There it is. The usual banter. His grip tightens just a little in response—not enough to hurt, just enough to make a point.

"Yeah?" he mutters. "Only for you, doll."

You tilt your head slightly to look up at him, a small smile tugging at your lips. "Don't let your brothers hear that."

"Please," he scoffs under his breath. "They already know. They just like runnin' their mouths."

You huff a quiet laugh, settling back down again. His hand starts moving absently along your side—not restless, not nervous. Just… there. A slow, grounding motion.

For a while, neither of you says anything. You just lie there. His warmth. His steady breathing. The quiet hum of the lair around you.

His voice comes again after a while, softer than before.

"Next time your friend drags you somewhere like that," he murmurs, "you call me sooner, baby."

You don’t even open your eyes. “Yeah… okay…”

His arm tightens just slightly around you, like he’s making sure you’re really there. And he doesn’t let go.

The room stays quiet for a long time. Not the heavy kind of silence—just the calm, steady kind that settles in when nothing needs to be said. You’re still tucked against Raph, your head resting comfortably against him, his arm wrapped around you like it belongs there.

At some point, your breathing slows. Not asleep. Just… softer. Raph notices. He always does. His hand, which had been idly tracing slow patterns against your side, stills for a moment. Then it shifts—careful, deliberate—moving up just slightly, like he’s adjusting without wanting to disturb you.

“You crashin’ on me, or what?” he murmurs quietly.

There’s no real complaint in it.

You hum faintly, eyes still closed. “Maybe.”

He lets out a low breath that almost sounds like a laugh. “Figures.”

But he doesn’t move you. Doesn’t pull away. If anything, he settles more into it. His thumb starts moving again, slower this time, tracing absentminded circles against your arm. It’s not something he’d ever do in front of anyone else—too gentle, too… him. But here, with you, there’s no hesitation.

You shift slightly, turning just enough so your face presses more into him. Your hand comes up without thinking, gripping lightly onto his shoulder. He freezes for half a second. Not because he dislikes it. Because he feels it. Then he relaxes again, his other arm adjusting so you’re more secure, more tucked in.

“Comfy?” he asks, voice lower now.

You nod against him. “Mhm…” A small pause. Then, quieter: “…Stay like this.”

It’s not really a question. Raph doesn’t answer right away—but his arms tighten just slightly around you, solid and grounding.

“Yeah,” he mutters. “Ain’t goin’ nowhere.”

There’s something about the way he says it—firm, certain—that settles deep in your chest. Your fingers curl a little more into him. For a while, it’s just that. Breathing. Warmth. The quiet hum of the lair in the background.

Then you tilt your head up just enough to look at him. He notices immediately.

“Somethin’ on your mind?” he asks.

You study him for a second. The sharp edges people always see—the size, the strength, the attitude—it's all still there. But not like this. Not with you.

"…Thanks for coming to get me," you say softly.

He huffs, like it's nothing—but his hand pauses again where it rests on you.

"Tch. 'Course I did."

You don't look away. "No, I mean it."

That gets him. You can see it in the way his expression shifts—just slightly. Less guarded. More… real. His gaze flicks away for a second, then back to you.

"You don't gotta thank me for that, baby," he says, quieter now. "You call, I'm there. That's it."

Simple. Like it's the easiest rule in the world.

Something in your chest tightens a little—not in a bad way. Just… full. You smile faintly, and before you can overthink it, you lean up just enough to press a soft kiss against his cheek.

It's quick. Light. But it lands.

Raph goes completely still. For a second, you almost think you broke him.

"…What was that for?" he mutters, though his voice has dropped a little.

You shrug slightly, settling back down against him like nothing happened. "Felt like it."

There's a pause. Then a low exhale leaves him, slower this time.

"…Yeah," he murmurs.

His hand shifts again, this time coming up to rest more securely against your back, pulling you in just a fraction closer. Not tight. Not possessive. Just… there. You can feel the difference. His chin dips slightly, brushing the top of your head for a brief second before he settles again. It's subtle—almost like he didn't mean to do it.

But he doesn't pull away. Minutes pass like that. Maybe more. Your eyes start to drift shut properly this time, your body going heavier against him. Raph notices. Of course he does.

"…Hey," he murmurs, softer now.

You hum faintly in response.

"You fallin' asleep on me for real?"

"…Maybe…" you mumble, barely awake.

There’s a quiet pause. Then, very gently—almost ridiculously so for someone like him—he shifts just enough to make you more comfortable, adjusting the way you’re lying so your neck isn’t strained, so you’re properly supported against him.

His arm stays around you the whole time. Doesn’t leave. Not once.

“…Aight,” he mutters under his breath.

And this time, there’s no teasing at all. Just warmth. His thumb resumes that slow, absent motion against your arm, steady and grounding, like he’s keeping you there without needing to hold tight.

“Get some sleep, doll,” he murmurs quietly.

You don’t answer. You don’t need to. Because you’re already there—curled up against him, breathing slow and even, completely at ease. Raph stays awake a little longer. Just watching. Just making sure. Then he leans back slightly into the pillows, keeping you tucked safely against his side. And he doesn’t move. Not even a little.

Chapter 32: “NEW CRUSH” —ft. 2012 Donatello

It wasn’t exactly a secret. At this point, it was more like… a recurring problem everyone had simply learned to live with.

You had a type. Or rather, you didn’t.

Because somehow, impossibly, your “type” kept including enemies.

“Okay, but listen—” you insisted, pacing the lair while the turtles watched like this was just another Tuesday, “—Karai has this whole mysterious vibe, and the way she flips mid-air? That’s not normal. That’s attractive.”

“She’s trying to kill us,” Raph cut in flatly.

“People can be multifaceted.”

Leo pinched the bridge of his nose. “You said that about Bradford too.”

“And I stand by it,” you shot back. “The man has discipline.”

“He tried to feed us to a mutant fish,” Mikey added.

“Still disciplined.”

Donnie didn’t even look up from his workbench. “Statistically speaking, your attraction patterns show a concerning bias toward high-risk individuals.”

“Or,” you countered, dropping onto the couch dramatically, “I just see the good in people.”

Raph snorted. “You saw the good in Shredder.”

You paused. “…Okay, that one might’ve been a phase.”

“A phase?” Leo repeated.

You waved a hand. “A brief, intense appreciation of… presence.”

Mikey leaned toward Raph. “They wanna fix him.”

“I do not—”

“You absolutely do,” all four turtles said in unison.

And that was that. No one took your crushes seriously anymore—not even you, really. They came fast, burned bright, and disappeared just as quickly. It was just how you worked.

Until it wasn’t.

It started small. You'd been cornered—wrong place, wrong time, one of those nights where everything spirals faster than you can keep up. A Foot soldier had you pinned, your back hitting concrete harder than you'd like to admit. And then—

A flash of purple. A precise strike. A staff spinning with calculated efficiency.

Donnie.

"Get behind me!" he snapped, voice sharper than usual, positioning himself between you and the threat.

You didn't argue. Didn't even think. You just… watched. The way he moved wasn't flashy like Leo, or aggressive like Raph. It was controlled. Intentional. Every hit had purpose. Every movement was calculated like he'd already solved the fight before it ended.

And when it was over—when the Foot soldier retreated and the tension snapped—you were still staring.

"Are you hurt?" Donnie asked, turning to you quickly, scanning for injuries.

You blinked. Oh. Oh no.

…

The turtles noticed before you said anything. They always did.

"Hey, Donnie," you said casually the next day, appearing at his lab table like it was completely normal, "what are you working on?"

Donnie froze. Raph slowly looked up from his weights. Leo didn't even bother hiding the sigh.

Mikey whispered, "Oh no."

Donnie cleared his throat, trying—and failing—to sound unaffected. "It's a recalibration of the T-Phone frequency to improve interdimensional signal stability."

You leaned in like he'd just said the most fascinating thing in the world. "That's so cool."

Donnie blinked. "…It is?"

"Yeah," you nodded earnestly. "Like—you're basically making communication across dimensions clearer. That's insane."

There was a pause. A very noticeable pause.

"…Correct," Donnie said, a little more stiffly, but there was something in his posture now—something subtly straighter.

From the couch, Raph muttered, "Oh, he's gone."

Mikey grinned. “He’s so gone.”

It escalated fast. You followed Donnie everywhere. Not in a creepy way—more like… a very enthusiastic shadow. You sat with him while he worked, asking questions—not the kind people asked to be polite, but real ones. Curious ones. The kind that made him explain things in detail, the kind that made him light up.

You listened. You got it. And when you didn’t, you wanted to. That alone was enough to completely undo him.

…

“Donnie,” you said one afternoon, peering over his shoulder, “what does this part do?”

“That’s a stabilizer—well, more specifically, it regulates—uh—”

You were closer than usual. He noticed. He noticed everything.

“…thermal output,” he finished, voice just slightly off.

“That’s smart,” you said, smiling. Donnie.exe stopped working.

The physical affection didn’t help. You hugged him. A lot. Quick hugs. Random hugs. The kind where you’d just walk up, wrap your arms around him, and then move on like it was nothing.

At first, he froze every time. Then he started expecting them. Then he started leaning into them.

“This is getting out of hand,” Leo said quietly from across the lair.

Donnie, currently being clung to while explaining something about circuitry, did not agree. “It’s fine,” he said, a little too quickly.

Raph raised an eyebrow. “You’re smiling.”

“I am not.”

“You are.”

“I’m simply—appreciating intellectual engagement.”

Mikey whispered, “He’s in love.”

“I am not in love!” Donnie snapped.

You pulled back slightly, blinking. “Did I do something wrong?”

Immediately, Donnie turned to you, panicked. “No! No, absolutely not, everything you are doing is—completely acceptable—encouraged, even—”

Raph buried his face in his hands.

…

Donnie thrived under your attention. There was no other way to put it. You treated him like he mattered—not just as part of the team, not just as "the smart one," but as Donnie. His work. His mind. Him. And he soaked it up like he'd been waiting for it his whole life.

So when it changed—
He noticed immediately.

It was subtle at first. You still talked to him. Still smiled. Still asked how he was doing. But you didn't linger anymore. Didn't hover near his lab. Didn't hug him. And most noticeably—

You stopped looking at him like he was the center of your attention.

Donnie frowned, watching you from across the lair. Something was off. Very off.

The answer came sooner than he expected. Unfortunately. April had stopped by. Nothing unusual there. She leaned against Donnie's workbench, smiling as he showed her something on his screen, explaining it with that same focused intensity he always had.

You were nearby. You saw it. The way he softened slightly when he spoke to her. The way he looked at her. And just like that—

Everything clicked into place.

"Oh," you murmured softly to yourself. It wasn't dramatic. No heartbreak. No anger. Just… understanding.

Of course.

The next time Donnie approached you, something was different.

"Hey," he said, a little unsure, "I, uh—haven't seen you around the lab much."

You smiled. It was warm. Just not the same.

"I didn't want to bother you," you said simply.

"…You're not a bother."

You hesitated, then shook your head lightly. "You're busy."

His frown deepened. "I've always been busy."

"Yeah," you said gently. "But now I get it."

Donnie blinked. "Get what?"

You glanced briefly across the room—toward April. It was quick. But it was enough. And then you looked back at him, still smiling, just… softer now.

“I don’t want to get in the way.”

Something in Donnie’s chest dropped. Hard.

“That’s not—” he started.

But you stepped back slightly. Not rejecting him. Not upset. Just… giving space. Like you would for someone who was already taken.

And for the first time since this whole thing started, Donnie didn’t feel lucky. He felt like he’d just lost something he hadn’t realized he could lose.

…

At first, Donnie told himself it was fine. Actually—better than fine. More efficient. More logical.

His workspace was quieter now. No unexpected interruptions. No sudden hugs that completely derailed his train of thought. No one leaning over his shoulder asking questions that, admittedly, he enjoyed answering far more than he should.

He could focus. Work faster. Think clearly. Yes. This was good. Optimal, even.

“Wow,” Mikey said one evening, watching Donnie type at a speed that almost looked aggressive. “You’re, like… extra productive.”

Donnie didn’t look up. “Distractions have been minimized.”

Raph snorted from the other side of the room. “That what we’re calling it?”

Leo, sitting nearby, glanced between them. “You don’t seem… happier.”

“I’m not aiming for ‘happier,’” Donnie replied shortly. “I’m aiming for efficiency.”

Mikey leaned toward Raph. “He’s coping.”

“I am not coping,” Donnie snapped.

“Totally coping.”

And for a while… he managed. He got used to the distance. Got used to you treating him like—well, like everyone else. Friendly. Kind. But not his.

Then he noticed something. At first, it was small. You laughed a little louder at something Leo said. You stayed near him during a conversation instead of drifting toward the lab out of habit. You started showing up during training sessions more often—watching, observing. Watching Leo.

Donnie paused mid-typing, his fingers hovering over the keyboard. No. No, that was—

That was nothing. You liked people easily. That wasn't new. This was normal. Right?

"Nice form," you said, sitting on the edge of the training area as Leo finished a kata.

Leo gave you a small, surprised smile. "Thanks."

"You make it look easy," you added, leaning your chin on your hand as you watched him.

Donnie's grip tightened around his bo staff. Across the room. Watching.

"Balance and repetition," Leo said modestly, though there was a hint of pride there. "Anyone can learn it."

"Maybe," you said, eyes still on him, "but not everyone looks that cool doing it."

Leo chuckled softly.

Mikey gasped dramatically. "IT BEGINS."

Raph slapped a hand over his mouth. "Shut up."

Donnie told himself it didn't matter. It shouldn't matter. It couldn't matter. But then—

You started asking Leo questions. Not scientific ones. Different ones.

"How do you stay so calm under pressure?"
"What goes through your head during a fight?"
"Do you ever get scared?"

Donnie noticed something uncomfortable settle in his chest. Because Leo answered you. And you listened. The same way you used to listen to him.

"No," Donnie muttered to himself, turning back to his workbench.

No, this was—
This was just how you were. This was a pattern. A cycle. You latched onto someone, gave them attention, then moved on. That's all this was. That's all it had ever been. So why did it feel different now?

The realization hit him slowly. Uncomfortably. Like something he didn't want to name.

Because this time—
He didn't want you to move on.

Donnie's jaw tightened as he adjusted something on his latest device, though his focus was completely gone now. Across the lair, you laughed again—soft, genuine. At something Leo said.

That should've been fine. It was fine. Leo was his brother. His leader. There was no threat here. No competition. No—

"Hey, Leo," you said, stepping closer to him, "do you think you could show me that move again?"

Donnie's hand slipped. A small spark snapped from the device in front of him.

"—Ow!"

Everyone turned.

"You okay?" Leo asked immediately.

"I'm fine," Donnie said quickly, pulling his hand back. "Just a minor miscalculation."

Raph raised an eyebrow. "You don't do 'minor miscalculations.'"

"I said I'm fine."

But he wasn't. Because now you were walking over. Concern on your face.

"Donnie, are you sure?" you asked gently, reaching for his hand without thinking.

And for a second—
Just a second—

Everything felt like it used to. Then you paused. Like you remembered something. And you pulled back slightly. Not cold. Not distant. Just… careful.

"I mean—uh—you should probably disinfect that," you added, gesturing awkwardly.

Donnie stared at you. That space between you? That wasn't there before. He hated it.

"I'll handle it," he said, quieter now.

You nodded. And just like that—
You were gone again. Back to Leo.

Something in Donnie snapped into place. Clear. Sharp. Unavoidable.

No. This wasn't fine.

He watched as Leo demonstrated the move again, slower this time, guiding you through it. Your attention. Your focus. Your smile. All of it shifting.

Donnie set his tools down. Carefully. Too carefully.

"Leo." His voice cut through the room. Not loud. But firm enough that everyone looked up.

Leo paused mid-explanation. "Yeah?"

Donnie stepped closer, his expression controlled—but there was something underneath it. Something tighter.

“I need your help with something. In the lab.”

Leo blinked. “Right now?”

“Yes. Right now.”

A beat of silence. Leo glanced at you, then back at Donnie.

“…Sure.”

You stepped back slightly, giving them space without question.

“Go ahead,” you said easily. “We can continue later.”

That word. Later. Donnie didn’t like the sound of that. He turned, already heading toward the lab without waiting. Leo followed, a little confused. The second they were out of earshot—

Leo spoke. “Okay… what was that about?”

Donnie stopped. His back to him. Silent for a moment.

“I need you to stop.”

Leo frowned. “Stop what?”

Donnie turned then. And there it was. Not anger. Not exactly. But something close to it. Something protective. Something… possessive.

“Don’t encourage it,” Donnie said.

Leo’s confusion deepened. “Encourage—what?”

“You know what I’m talking about.”

A pause. Then—

“Oh.” Leo exhaled slowly, crossing his arms. “Donnie…”

“It’s just a phase,” Donnie continued quickly. “You’ve seen it before. It’ll pass. But you don’t have to—fuel it.”

“I’m not ‘fueling’ anything,” Leo said calmly. “I’m just being nice.”

“That’s exactly the problem.”

Another silence. Heavier this time. Leo studied him carefully.

“…You didn’t have a problem with it before.”

Donnie's expression faltered—just for a fraction of a second. "Before was different."

"How?"

Donnie hesitated. And that hesitation said everything. Leo's eyes softened slightly.

"…Oh."

Donnie looked away. Jaw tight. "I'm not asking for much," he said, quieter now. "Just… don't let it become something."

Leo held his gaze for a moment longer. Then sighed. "…You should probably talk to them."

"No."

"Donnie—"

"No," he repeated firmly. "It'll pass."

Leo didn't look convinced. "Yeah," he said slowly. "That's kind of the problem, isn't it?"

Donnie didn't answer. Because for the first time he wasn't sure he wanted it to pass.

…

Donnie tried to go back to normal after that. Tried being the key word. Because now that he'd actually noticed it—noticed you drifting, noticed your attention shifting—he couldn't unsee it. Every laugh you gave someone else landed wrong. Every time you chose to sit somewhere that wasn't next to him, it felt… deliberate, even when it wasn't. And the worst part?

You weren't doing anything wrong. You were being considerate. Giving him space. Respecting something that… didn't even exist. It bothered him more than it should've. More than he was comfortable admitting.

So he did what he always did when something didn't make sense. He tried to fix it.

He found you alone. That part wasn't hard—you still spent time in the lair, still moved around the same way. Just… orbiting differently now. You were sitting on the couch, flipping idly through something, legs tucked under you in that absent-minded way you always had.

For a moment, Donnie just stood there. Watching. Thinking. Overthinking.

"…Hey."

You looked up immediately. And smiled. That same warm smile. Just… not as bright as before.

"Hey, Donnie."

There it was again. That subtle difference. Enough to make something in his chest tighten.

He stepped closer, adjusting his grip on his bo staff even though he didn't need to.

“I, uh… wanted to talk to you.”

“Okay,” you said easily, setting aside what you were holding. “What’s up?”

Straightforward. Open. Like always.

And suddenly, Donnie—who could explain interdimensional theory without blinking—didn’t know how to start a simple conversation.

“It’s about… earlier,” he said finally.

“Earlier?” you tilted your head slightly.

“In the lab. And—recently. In general.”

You frowned a little. Concern, not defensiveness.

“…Did I do something wrong?”

That again. That assumption. And it hit him—harder than expected—that you genuinely thought that.

“No,” he said quickly. “No, that’s not—it’s not that.”

You relaxed slightly, but the question was still there in your eyes. Waiting.

Donnie exhaled slowly. “…You’ve been different.”

There. He said it. You paused. Just for a second. Then you gave a small, understanding nod.

“Oh.” No denial. No confusion. Just… acceptance. “I didn’t want to bother you,” you said simply.

That word again. Bother. Donnie’s grip tightened slightly.

“You weren’t a bother.”

You gave him a look. Gentle. But firm in a way that told him you believed what you were saying.

“Donnie… it’s okay.”

“No, it’s not—”

You shook your head softly, cutting him off—not rudely, just… carefully.

“You don’t have to explain,” you said. “I get it.”

And that—
That frustrated him more than anything.

“You don’t,” Donnie said, more sharply than he meant to.

You blinked, surprised. “…What?”

“I don’t think you do get it,” he continued, trying to rein himself back in, but the words were already coming now. “Because if you did, you wouldn’t be—avoiding me.”

“I’m not avoiding you,” you said quickly.

“You are.”

“I’m just giving you space.”

“I didn’t ask for space.”

That stopped you. Completely. There was a pause. A real one this time. Heavy. Uncomfortable.

“…You didn’t have to,” you said quietly. “I saw.”

“Saw what?”

You hesitated. Then glanced—briefly—toward the lab. Toward where April usually stood when she visited. Donnie followed your gaze. And everything clicked.

“…April.”

You nodded slightly, like that explained everything. “Yeah.”

For a second, Donnie just stared at you. Then:

“…No.”

You frowned. “No?”

“No,” he repeated, more firmly. “That’s not—there’s nothing—” He stopped, exhaling in frustration, running a hand over his head. “There’s nothing going on with April,” he said, more controlled now. “There never has been.”

You didn’t look convinced. “Donnie…”

“I know she doesn’t like me like that.”

That landed heavier than he expected. But he didn’t take it back.

You softened immediately. “Oh.”

Not pity. Just… understanding.

“And even if she did,” Donnie added, quieter now, “that’s not the point.”

You tilted your head slightly. “Then what is?”

And here it was. The part he hadn’t planned. The part he hadn’t even fully admitted to himself until now. Donnie hesitated.

Then—

“…I liked it.”

You blinked. “…Liked what?”

He looked at you then. Really looked. And didn’t look away this time.

“The attention,” he admitted.

It sounded small when he said it out loud. Simpler than it felt.

“When you were around. Asking questions. Staying in the lab. Listening,” he continued, voice quieter but steady. “I liked that.”

You didn’t interrupt. Didn’t joke. Didn’t deflect. You just… listened. Like you always had.

“It made things easier,” he went on. “Explaining things. Thinking through problems. And—”

He stopped. Jaw tightening slightly. Because this part felt… too exposed.

“And?” you prompted gently.

Donnie exhaled. “…It made me happier.”

That hung in the air between you. Clear. Unfiltered. Honest in a way he didn’t usually allow himself to be.

Your expression shifted. Not into a smile. Not into teasing. Something softer. Something a little more serious.

“…You have April for that,” you said quietly.

Not bitter. Not accusing. Just… stating what you thought was obvious. And Donnie shook his head immediately.

“No. That’s not—”

He stepped closer without realizing it. Frustration bleeding through again—not at you, but at the situation.

“It wasn’t the same,” he said.

You frowned slightly. “What do you mean?”

“With April, it’s—” he paused, searching for the right word. “—different. Complicated. And one-sided.”

You winced a little at that, but didn’t argue.

“But with you…” he trailed off. And for a second, Donnie—the guy who always had the right explanation—struggled. “…With you, it wasn’t like that,” he finished more quietly.

You didn’t speak. Didn’t rush him.

“You actually wanted to be there,” he continued. “You asked questions because you were curious, not because you felt obligated. You listened because you cared about the answer.” His voice dropped slightly. “And you made it feel like… what I was doing mattered.”

You swallowed. Just a small movement. But he noticed.

“And yeah,” Donnie added, a little more bluntly now, “the attention helped. I’m not going to pretend it didn’t.” A beat. “But it wasn’t just that.”

You finally spoke. “…Then what was it?”

Donnie hesitated again. But less this time. “It was you.”

Simple. Direct. And somehow heavier than everything else he’d said. The room felt quieter after that. Like something had shifted.

You looked at him for a long moment. Really looked. Like you were trying to figure something out.

“…I thought I was doing the right thing,” you said eventually.

Your voice was softer now. Less certain.

“By stepping back?” Donnie asked.

You nodded. “I didn’t want to get in the way of something real.”

Donnie shook his head again. Slower this time. “You weren’t in the way.”

For a moment, neither of you moved. The air between you felt… different now. Not tense. Not awkward. Just honest in a way it hadn’t been before.

Donnie shifted slightly, like he wasn’t entirely sure what to do with himself after saying all that. Which, for him, was rare. He cleared his throat, adjusting his grip on his bo staff again —something to ground himself.

“…So,” he started, then paused.

You waited. Patient. Open.

He exhaled quietly. "…If you want," he said, a little more carefully this time, "you can… come back to the lab."

You blinked. "Come back?"

Donnie nodded, avoiding your eyes for half a second before forcing himself to meet them again.

"Like before," he clarified. "You don't have to—change anything. Ask questions. Stay. Interrupt. Whatever it is you were doing."

A small pause. Then, more quietly—

"I didn't mind."

You stared at him. And for a second, Donnie braced himself—because with you, reactions were never predictable. But then—

Your face lit up. Not dramatically. Not overwhelmingly. Just… genuinely. Warm in a way he hadn't seen directed at him in a while.

"Really?" you asked, leaning forward slightly.

Donnie nodded once. "Really."

And that was it. That was all you needed.

"Okay," you said quickly—too quickly to be casual, but you didn't even try to hide it. "Yeah. I'd like that."

There was a small shift in your posture now. Subtle. But familiar.nSomething in Donnie's chest eased.

"Good," he said, and for once, he didn't overthink the word.

It didn't snap back to normal immediately. It wasn't like flipping a switch. But it started there.

The next day, you hovered near the lab again. Not as close as before. Not right away. You leaned against the entrance, watching him work for a minute like you were testing the waters.

Donnie noticed.nOf course he noticed. He always did.

"You can come in," he said without looking up.

Your lips twitched slightly. "I know."

But you stepped in anyway. Progress.

At first, your questions were lighter. Safer.

“What are you working on?”
“How does that part work again?”

Stuff you already kind of knew. Donnie answered every single one. Not rushed. Not distracted. Deliberate. Like he understood what you were doing. And let you.

A couple days later, you sat next to him again. Not just nearby. Next to him. Close enough to look over his shoulder. Close enough that he could feel the warmth of you there.

“Wait,” you said, leaning in slightly, “so if that overheats, wouldn’t it mess up the whole system?”

Donnie paused. Then glanced at you.

“…Yes,” he admitted. “Unless—”

“Unless you add a second regulator,” you finished, pointing at the schematic.

There it was. That spark. That interest.

Donnie felt something familiar settle back into place. Something he hadn’t realized how much he missed until it was gone.

“Exactly,” he said, and there was a faint smile in his voice now.

From across the lair, Mikey whispered loudly, “THEY’RE BACK.”

Raph didn’t even bother hiding his grin. “Took ‘em long enough.”

Leo just shook his head slightly—but there was relief there too.

The physical stuff came back slower. More careful. The first time you hugged him again, it wasn’t random. It wasn’t impulsive. It was after he’d finished explaining something particularly complicated, and you just—

“…That’s actually amazing,” you said softly.

Then leaned in. Wrapped your arms around him. Donnie froze. Instinctively. For half a second. Then he relaxed.

“…Thank you,” he muttered, a little quieter than usual. But he didn’t pull away.

After that, it got easier. Not constant like before. But natural. You started spending more time there again. Sitting on the floor with your back against his workbench. Swinging your legs absentmindedly while he worked. Handing him tools without him asking.

And Donnie—
Donnie started smiling more.

It wasn't obvious to anyone who didn't know him. But his brothers noticed. Of course they did.

"You're less annoying now," Raph said one evening.

Donnie didn't even look up. "Statistically improbable."

"You smiled twice today."

"I did not."

"You did."

Mikey leaned in. "He did. It was creepy but also kinda sweet."

Donnie ignored them. But he didn't deny it this time. Because they weren't wrong. Things weren't exactly the same. They were… better in some ways. More aware. More intentional.

And you hadn't lost that feeling entirely. That small, stubborn warmth in your chest when you looked at him. It was still there. Quieter now. But real.

And Donnie? He noticed that too. He just… Didn't push it. Not this time. Instead, he let things settle. Let you be there. Let himself enjoy it without overanalyzing every second.

One evening, as you sat beside him again—closer than usual, your shoulder lightly brushing his—you looked over at him.

"…Hey, Donnie?"

He hummed in response, focused on adjusting something small and precise.

"I'm glad I came back."

He paused. Just for a second.

"…Yeah," he said quietly. "Me too."

Chapter 33: “HEATED ARGUMENT” —ft. Bayverse Leonardo

The argument doesn’t start loud. That’s what makes it worse. It starts low, controlled—too controlled. The kind of quiet that means both of you have been holding things in for a while. The lair feels tighter than usual, like even the walls are listening.

Leonardo stands in front of you, arms crossed, posture rigid in that way he gets when he’s trying to be “the leader” instead of just… himself. His voice is calm, but there’s an edge underneath it.

“I’m not asking you. I’m telling you it’s too dangerous.”

You let out a short, humorless laugh, shaking your head. “There it is. Again.”

His brows (if he had) knit together slightly. “What does that mean?”

“It means,” you step closer, your voice sharpening, “you don’t trust me.”

“That’s not what I said.”

“It’s exactly what you said, Leo. You just dressed it up like an order.”

His jaw tightens. You can see the shift happen—the moment he stops hearing you and starts digging his heels in.

“I’m trying to keep you safe.”

“And I’m trying to not be treated like dead weight!” you snap back.

The words echo louder than you expect. Somewhere in the lair, you hear movement—probably one of the others—but neither of you looks away.

Leonardo exhales slowly through his nose, like he’s forcing patience. “You’re not dead weight. But you’re human. You don’t have the training we do, and if something goes wrong —”

“If something goes wrong, I deal with it,” you cut in. “Like I always do.”

“That’s not good enough.”

That lands. You stare at him, something in your expression shifting—hurt, sharp and immediate.

“…Not good enough.”

“I didn’t mean it like that.”

“Then how did you mean it?” you challenge, your voice quieter now, but more dangerous. “Because it sounds like no matter what I do, it’s never going to be enough for you to actually see me as part of this team.”

“You are part of the team,” he insists, but there’s frustration creeping in now. “But there are limits—”

“There it is again. Limits. Rules. Orders.” You shake your head, stepping back like you need space to breathe. “God, you don’t even hear yourself.”

“I’m the leader. It’s my responsibility to—”

“I didn’t ask you to be my leader.”

Silence. That one hits harder than anything else. Leonardo’s expression changes—subtle, but you catch it. Like something cracks, just for a second, before he locks it down again.

“You’re part of this family,” he says, quieter now. “That means I’m responsible for you.”

“No,” you reply, your voice steady in a way that surprises even you. “That means you care. It doesn’t mean you get to control me.”

“I’m not controlling you.”

“You’re deciding what I can and can’t do without even listening to me. What would you call that?”

He doesn’t answer right away, and that silence says enough. Your chest feels tight, like something’s building and you can’t stop it anymore.

“I stand by you. Every time. I back you up, I trust your calls, I put myself in danger for you—and the second I ask for that same trust back, suddenly I’m ‘too human’.”

“That’s not fair.”

“No, what’s not fair is you acting like I’m a liability instead of your partner.”

“I never said you were a liability.”

“You didn’t have to.”

The words hang between you, heavy and suffocating. Leonardo runs a hand over his face, clearly trying to keep control of the situation, but now he’s losing it too.

“You’re twisting this.”

“I’m not twisting anything, I’m listening.”

“You’re emotional right now.”

That’s it.

You actually freeze for a second, like your brain needs a moment to process what he just said. Then you let out a quiet, disbelieving breath.

"…Wow."

"I didn't mean—"

"No, no, don't fix it now," you cut him off, holding up a hand. "You already said it."

"I'm trying to have a rational conversation."

"And I'm trying to be heard!" Your voice rises again, cracking at the edges now. "But you've already decided I'm wrong, so what's the point?"

"That's not true."

"Then prove it," you shoot back immediately. "Let me come on this mission."

"No."

It's instant. Firm. Final. And something in you just… drops. There's no more anger left to push it forward. Just a dull, heavy disappointment.

You nod slowly, looking down for a second before meeting his eyes again. "Okay."

Leonardo blinks, thrown off. "Okay…?"

"Yeah. Okay." You swallow, your voice quieter now, but steady. "Now I know exactly where I stand."

"That's not—"

"I'm done arguing with you, Leo."

You turn before he can stop you.

"Wait—"

"No." You shake your head, already moving away. "You've said enough."

He steps forward, reaching out like he might grab your arm, but stops himself at the last second.

"…You'll cool off," he says instead, more to convince himself than you. "We can talk about this tomorrow."

You pause near the exit. For a second, it almost looks like you might turn around. But you don't.

"Yeah," you murmur without looking back. "Maybe."

Leonardo doesn't chase you.

At first, it feels like the right call. You're angry, emotions are high—it's better to give you space. That's what he tells himself as he stands there, staring at the empty space where you just were.

"She'll come back tomorrow," he mutters under his breath.

Donnie, who's been half-listening from his station, glances over but doesn't say anything.

Raph crosses his arms, leaning against a wall. "…You really screwed that up, huh?"

Leo shoots him a look. "Stay out of it."

"Just saying."

Mikey, for once, is quieter than usual. "…She looked really mad."

"I know what she looked like," Leo snaps, a little sharper than he means to.

The lair falls into an awkward silence. Still, he holds onto that thought. Tomorrow. You'll come back tomorrow.

You don't.

The first day, he's irritated more than anything.

"She's just proving my point," he says, pacing slightly. "Running off like that instead of talking it through—"

But he keeps glancing toward the entrance. The second day, he's quieter. By the third, he starts asking.

"…Has anyone heard from her?"

Donnie doesn't even look up from his screen. "She texted earlier."

Leo stops. "And?"

"She's fine."

"That's it?"

"That's all she said to me."

Leo hesitates. "…Did she say anything about coming back?"

"Nope."

Raph shrugs from the couch. "She replied to me too."

Leo turns quickly. “What did she say to you?”

“That she’s alive and not to worry.”

“…Did she ask about me?”

Raph raises a brow. “…No.”

That one stings more than he expects. By day five, it’s not irritation anymore. It’s something heavier. Something he doesn’t want to name. He tries messaging you. No response. He tries again later. Still nothing.

But then he hears Mikey laughing at his phone, and something in Leo’s chest tightens.

“…What?”

Mikey looks up, a little sheepish. “Oh—uh, nothing.”

“Is she texting you?”

“…Yeah.”

Leo’s grip tightens slightly. “What is she saying?”

Mikey hesitates. “…Just normal stuff. Memes. Checking in.”

“And she’s not answering me.”

The room goes quiet again. No one really knows what to say to that. By the end of the week, the truth is impossible to ignore.

You’re not just cooling off. You’re avoiding him. Deliberately. You’re still in contact with everyone else—Donnie gets updates, Raph gets short replies, Mikey gets actual conversations.

But Leonardo? Nothing. Not a word.

He sits alone near the edge of the lair that night, elbows resting on his knees, phone in his hands. Your chat is still open. His last message—“Can we talk?”—left on read.

His jaw tightens as he stares at it.

“…You said tomorrow,” he murmurs under his breath, almost bitterly.

But tomorrow came and went. And so did the next six days. And you never came back.

…

The city is quieter at night, but not silent.

Up on the rooftop of your building, the wind cuts sharper than it does down on the streets, slipping between concrete edges and metal railings. It tugs at anything loose, whispers against surfaces, carries that cold that settles into your bones if you stay still too long.

Leonardo doesn't move.

He stands near the edge, looking down at the familiar balcony below—your balcony. The one he's been staring at for the past ten minutes like it might give him an answer if he waits long enough.

It doesn't.

His grip tightens slightly around the handle of one of his katanas, not out of threat—just something to ground himself.

"…This is stupid," he mutters under his breath.

But he's still there.

Because a week without you hasn't made anything clearer. If anything, it's worse. Every version of the conversation plays in his head on repeat, each one ending differently, each one with something he should have said or shouldn't have said.

And none of it changes the fact that you're still not there. Still not answering. Still choosing everyone else over him. That last part stings more than he wants to admit.

His jaw tightens. "…Fine."

Before he can second-guess it again, he moves. A quick, controlled drop from the rooftop—silent, precise—and then he lands lightly on the railing of your balcony before stepping down onto the concrete like he's done it a hundred times before.

The door is shut. Lights are on inside. He hesitates for half a second. Then he knocks.

…

At first, you think you imagined it.

You're halfway across your apartment, wrapped in a hoodie, when the sound hits again—soft, but unmistakable.

A knock. On your balcony door.

Your stomach drops. For a second, your brain jumps to the worst possible conclusions—but something about the rhythm of it… it's familiar. Too familiar. You walk over slowly, cautious, pulling the curtain aside just enough to look—

—and your breath catches.

"…You've gotta be kidding me."

Leonardo stands on your balcony like it's the most normal thing in the world. Of course he does. You stare at him through the glass, disbelief written all over your face. He looks back at you, just as tense, just as unsure—but trying to hide it behind that same controlled expression.

For a moment, neither of you moves. Then you yank the door open.

"Are you serious right now?" you whisper harshly, glancing instinctively over your shoulder like your neighbors might somehow see a giant mutant turtle standing outside your apartment.

"I needed to talk to you."

"You broke into my balcony, Leo."

"I knocked."

"Oh, right, my bad—completely normal behavior then."

The sarcasm lands, but it doesn't push him back. If anything, it makes his expression harden slightly.

"Can I come in or not?"

You hesitate. Not because you don't want to let him in. Because you do, and that annoys you more than anything. The cold air slips inside past him, brushing against your arms, and you exhale sharply before stepping aside.

"…Get in before someone sees you."

He doesn't argue with that. Leonardo steps inside, and the moment he does, the space feels different—smaller somehow, more tense. Like the argument from a week ago just walked in with him.

You shut the door behind him, crossing your arms.

"Well?" you say, turning to face him. "You gonna explain why you're suddenly climbing into my apartment in the middle of the night, or—"

"I needed to see you."

The words come out quicker than expected. Not soft. Not emotional. Just… direct. It throws you off for a second.

You blink, studying him. "…That's it?"

"That's not it," he says, his tone tightening slightly. "But it's why I'm here."

You let out a slow breath, shaking your head as you pace a couple steps away, then back again. "You had a week to text me something like that."

“I tried.”

“You sent two messages, Leo.”

“And you ignored both of them.”

“I didn’t ignore—” you stop yourself, exhaling sharply. “I needed space.”

“For a week?” he shoots back.

Your eyes narrow. “Yeah. For a week.”

“That’s not space, that’s avoiding the problem.”

“And showing up here uninvited is solving it?”

“At least I’m doing something,” he snaps.

The room goes tight again. You stare at him, that familiar frustration rising back up like it never left.

“Oh, so now you care about doing something?”

“I always cared.”

“Could’ve fooled me.”

His jaw clenches. “You’re still stuck on that?”

“You don’t get to decide when I’m ‘stuck’ on something,” you fire back. “You don’t get to decide anything for me, remember?”

“I’m not trying to—”

“You always are,” you cut in. “That’s the problem.”

Leonardo exhales sharply, dragging a hand over his face before looking back at you, eyes sharper now.

“You walked out.”

“Yes, I did.”

“You didn’t even try to talk it through.”

“I did try, Leo. You just didn’t listen.”

“I listened,” he insists.

“No, you waited your turn to talk,” you correct, your voice cutting. “There’s a difference.”

That hits, even if he doesn't want to admit it. For a second, he doesn't respond. Then—

"You're acting like I was completely wrong."

You actually laugh a little at that, but there's no humor in it. "I'm acting like you treated me like I didn't matter."

"That's not what I did."

"It's exactly what you did."

"I was trying to protect you!"

"And I didn't ask you to!" you snap, stepping closer again. "I asked you to trust me."

"And I told you why I couldn't."

There it is. That same wall. That same answer. Nothing's changed. You stare at him, searching his face for something—anything—different. But it's all still there. The stubbornness. The control. That quiet belief that he's doing the right thing, no matter what it costs.

"…So why are you here, then?" you ask, quieter now, but heavier. "If you still think you're right."

Leonardo hesitates. Just for a moment. Because that's the part he didn't fully plan out.

"I—" he starts, then stops, his gaze shifting slightly before locking back onto yours. "… Because this isn't how it's supposed to be."

You frown. "What does that even mean?"

"It means you're gone for a week, you're talking to everyone except me, and you think that's just fine?"

"I never said it was fine."

"Then why do it?"

"Because I was mad!" you shoot back. "Still am, in case that wasn't clear."

"Yeah, I got that."

"Good."

Silence settles again, heavier this time. Neither of you backs down. Neither of you apologizes. And that's the problem. Leonardo crosses his arms again, slipping back into that defensive posture like it's second nature.

"I'm not going to apologize for trying to keep you safe."

“And I’m not going to apologize for wanting to be treated like an equal.”

His eyes narrow slightly. “You’re asking for something I can’t guarantee.”

“And you’re asking me to accept something I won’t.”

There it is. The line. Clear. Unmoving. Right between you. The same one from a week ago. And neither of you steps over it. For a while, neither of you says anything.

The tension doesn’t explode this time—it just sits there, heavy and unmoving, like both of you are too tired to keep pushing but too stubborn to step back.

You’re still standing a few feet apart, arms crossed, breathing uneven. Leonardo hasn’t moved either, but there’s something different now. Less sharp. Less… certain.

Your last words are still hanging in the air.

You won’t accept it.
He can’t guarantee it.

A deadlock. And for once, Leonardo doesn’t immediately try to break it with another argument. Instead, he looks away. It’s small. Subtle. But for him, it’s everything.

You notice.

“…Then why can’t you?” you ask, quieter this time. Not challenging—just… asking.

He doesn’t answer right away. His gaze stays off to the side, jaw tight, like he’s weighing something. You can almost see the internal fight—what he wants to say versus what he’s willing to admit.

Because this isn’t about strategy anymore. This is something else.

“…Because I don’t trust the situation,” he says finally.

You sigh, already feeling that frustration creep back. “Leo—”

“And I don’t trust that things won’t go wrong,” he adds quickly, cutting over you.

You stop. That wasn’t the usual answer. He’s still not looking at you.

“And I don’t trust…” he exhales slowly, like the words are heavier than he expected, “…that I’ll get there in time if they do.”

That lands differently. You don’t interrupt this time. Leonardo’s grip tightens slightly at his sides, like he’s bracing himself just by saying it out loud.

“I’ve seen how fast things can go bad,” he continues, quieter now. “One second everything’s fine, and the next—” He cuts himself off, shaking his head. “It doesn’t matter how good you are. How prepared. Sometimes it just… happens.”

His voice isn't sharp anymore. It's controlled, yeah—but there's something underneath it now. Something a lot less solid.

"I can plan for a lot of things," he says. "I can lead, I can fight, I can make calls under pressure. That's my job."

Finally, he looks at you again. "But I can't control everything."

There's a pause. And then, more quietly—

"And I can't… lose someone because I wasn't fast enough to stop it."

That's it. That's the truth he's been dancing around this entire time. Not control. Not authority.

Fear. Real, raw, buried-under-everything fear.

Your expression softens before you can stop it. Because suddenly, the argument doesn't sound the same in your head anymore. All those moments—him shutting you down, saying no, drawing lines—it didn't come from thinking you were weak. It came from thinking the world is unpredictable… and that he might fail you in it.

"…Leo," you murmur, your voice quieter now.

He looks like he regrets saying it already. Not because it isn't true—but because it is, and now it's out there, and he doesn't know what you're going to do with it.

"I'm not saying you can't handle yourself," he adds quickly, like he needs to correct it. "I know you can. I've seen it. That's not the point."

"Then what is?" you ask gently.

"The point is…" he hesitates, then exhales, shoulders lowering just a fraction. "…I don't want to be standing somewhere, realizing you needed help and I wasn't there."

Silence. But it's not the same kind as before. This one isn't sharp. It's… fragile.

You take a small step closer. He doesn't move back.

"That's what this is about?" you ask, softer now.

He doesn't answer with words this time. But he doesn't deny it either. And that's enough. You look at him differently now—not as the stubborn, controlling leader who refused to listen…but as someone who's carrying more weight than he lets anyone see. Someone who cares, just… in a way that ended up hurting you.

Your arms slowly uncross.

"…You really think I'd blame you for that?" you ask.

His brows knit slightly. “That’s not—”

“No, listen,” you interrupt gently, not harsh this time. “If something happened to me… you think I’d look at you and go ‘this is your fault’?”

He hesitates. And that hesitation says everything. You let out a quiet breath, shaking your head a little.

“That’s not how I see you, Leo.”

He watches you carefully now, like he’s trying to understand where this shift is coming from.

“And yeah,” you admit, “things can go wrong. I know that. I’m not stupid.”

“I never said you were.”

“I know,” you say softly. “But you acted like I didn’t understand the risk.”

He doesn’t argue that. Because… he did. You step a little closer again, your voice steady, but no longer sharp.

“I’m not asking you to control everything,” you continue. “I’m asking you to trust that if something does go wrong… I won’t just fall apart waiting for you to save me.”

That hits him in a different place. You can see it.

“I need to know you see me as someone who can stand on my own,” you add. “Not just someone you have to protect all the time.”

Leonardo exhales slowly, the tension in his shoulders shifting—not gone, but… different.

Less defensive. More conflicted.

“I do see you like that,” he says, quieter now.

You tilt your head slightly. “Then act like it.”

He doesn’t respond right away. Because that’s the part he’s still struggling with. The fear doesn’t just disappear because he understands your point now. And your frustration doesn’t just disappear because you understand his.

Leonardo looks at you, really looks this time—not like a leader assessing risk, not like someone trying to win an argument. Just… you.

“…I needed to see you,” he repeats, quieter now. “Not just talk through a screen.”

You study him for a moment. Then nod, just slightly.

“I can tell.”

The shift between you is still settling. It's not fixed—not even close—but it's softer now. The sharp edges from before have dulled, replaced by something quieter, more careful. You're both still standing there, a little closer than before, the air no longer charged with anger but with something… uncertain.

Leonardo hasn't moved away. Neither have you. And for a second, it almost feels like you might actually talk this through without it turning into another fight—

Knock. Knock.

You freeze. So does he. The sound cuts clean through the room, loud in the silence.

"Hey—are you still awake?"

Your stomach drops. You and Leo both snap into motion at the same time—eyes wide, immediate panic.

"…You've got to be kidding me," you whisper.

Leo's head turns sharply toward the door, then back to you. "Who is that?"

"My dad," you mouth quickly, already grabbing his arm and pulling him toward the balcony. "Go—now."

Another knock. Firmer. "I can hear you talking."

Leo straightens instantly, every bit of softness gone as his body shifts into alert mode. His eyes flick across the room, calculating.

"Balcony," he mutters.

"Yeah, I know—move."

He doesn't hesitate. In one smooth motion, he slips through the balcony door just as the handle to your bedroom starts turning. You barely manage to pull the curtain halfway across before—

The door opens.

You turn quickly, trying to look normal, heart racing way too fast.

"What?" you say, a little too quickly.

Your father stands there, looking slightly suspicious, arms loosely crossed.

"I heard you talking," he says, glancing around. "Who were you with?"

You shrug, forcing your tone casual. "No one. I was watching something."

He doesn't look convinced. His eyes move past you, scanning the room slowly. Your bed. Your desk. The corners. For a second, it feels like he's going to step further in. You shift just

enough to block the direct view of the balcony.

"…You sure?" he asks.

"Yeah," you reply, steadier now. "The volume was kind of high."

You grab your phone and tap it like you're lowering something, just to sell it. He watches you for another moment. Then sighs.

"Then turn it down," he says. "It's late."

"I know."

"And try to get some sleep."

"Okay."

There's a pause. He looks around one more time—slower, like he's double-checking—but everything looks normal. Because it is.

Finally, he steps back. "Goodnight."

"Night."

The door closes. You stay still for a few seconds, just listening. No footsteps coming back. No second knock.

Silence.

"…Oh my God," you breathe out, dragging a hand through your hair. "I actually almost died."

There's a soft movement from the balcony. You turn quickly, rushing over and pulling the curtain aside. Leo is crouched low near the railing, pressed close to the wall, completely still. His head turns toward you immediately.

"…Is he gone?" he asks quietly.

"Yeah," you whisper. "You can come in."

He moves fast again, slipping back inside. You shut the door behind him, exhaling sharply.

"Okay—no—this is exactly what I mean," you start, voice low but heated again, pacing a little. "I have zero privacy in this house. He just walks in whenever he wants."

Leo glances at the door, then back at you. "…He knocked."

"Yeah, and then came in anyway," you shoot back. "That's not knocking, that's a warning."

He considers that. "…Fair."

You cross your arms, still restless from the adrenaline.

“What was I supposed to say? ‘Oh yeah, just talking to a six-foot mutant turtle on my balcony, don’t worry about it’?”

Leo lets out a quiet breath—almost a laugh. “I could’ve stayed out there.”

“In this cold? Please. You’d freeze.”

“I’ve handled worse.”

“Yeah, well, not on my watch.”

The words slip out before you think about them. You both notice. There’s a small pause after that—subtle, but real. Leo looks at you a little differently for a second, like he caught something in that sentence you didn’t mean to emphasize.

But he doesn’t push it. Instead, he glances back at the door.

“…We should keep it down.”

“No kidding.”

For a moment, neither of you says anything. The room is quieter now—not just because you’re both keeping your voices low, but because something in the tension has finally… settled. Not gone, but eased enough to breathe around it.

You’re standing closer than before again. Not on opposite sides anymore. And somehow, that matters.

You glance at him, then away, like you’re trying to figure out how to start something that isn’t another argument.

“…Hey,” you say softly.

Leo looks at you immediately, like he’s been waiting for you to say something. You hesitate. That stubborn part of you is still there—the one that doesn’t want to back down, doesn’t want to feel like you’re “losing.” But it doesn’t feel like that anymore.

Not after everything he said. Not after understanding what was actually behind it.

You exhale quietly.

“…I’m sorry.”

That gets his attention. Not because he didn’t hear you—but because he didn’t expect it.

“For what?” he asks, softer now.

You shrug a little, but your eyes don’t leave the floor at first.

“For… disappearing like that,” you admit. “For not answering you.”

You pause, then add more honestly—

“I was mad. Like… really mad. And I didn’t trust myself to talk to you without making it worse.”

Leo watches you carefully, not interrupting.

“I know I still talked to the others,” you continue, a little more awkward now. “That wasn’t… to make a point or anything. I just—” you huff a small breath, shaking your head. “I didn’t know how to talk to you specifically.”

That lands. Because it’s honest.

You finally look up at him.

“I shouldn’t have shut you out like that,” you say. “That wasn’t fair.”

There’s a small silence after that. Not heavy. Just… real. Leo shifts slightly, like he’s thinking through his response instead of reacting.

“…I didn’t make it easy to talk to me either,” he admits.

You blink a little at that. It’s not dramatic. Not a big apology speech. But for him? That’s a lot.

“You didn’t,” you say, a faint hint of a smile tugging at your lips.

“I know.”

There’s a pause. Then, quieter—

“I kept waiting for you to come back the next day.”

You tilt your head slightly. “…Yeah?”

He nods once, looking off to the side for a second before meeting your eyes again.

“And then the next day.”

Something in your chest tightens a little.

“And then it was a week,” he adds, his voice dropping just slightly. “And you were talking to everyone except me.”

There’s no accusation in it this time. Just… honesty.

You shift your weight, a bit sheepish now. “Yeah… I kinda deserve that.”

He exhales softly, shaking his head.

“It was frustrating,” he admits. “I kept thinking—” he stops himself, then continues anyway, more quietly, “—that maybe you weren’t coming back at all.”

That hits harder than anything else he’s said tonight. Your expression softens immediately.

“Leo…”

“I know that sounds stupid,” he mutters, looking away again.

“It doesn’t,” you say gently.

He goes quiet. For a second, it looks like he’s going to brush it off—pull back into that composed, controlled version of himself. But he doesn’t. Instead, he exhales slowly.

“…I missed you.”

The words are simple. No buildup. No dramatic tone. Just… true. And somehow, that makes them land even harder. You don’t respond right away. Because for a second, your brain just… stops. All the frustration from the past week, all the stubbornness, all the pride—it just melts down into something softer, warmer, a little overwhelming.

“…You did?” you ask quietly.

Leo gives you a small look, somewhere between disbelief and mild exasperation.

“Yeah,” he says. “Of course I did.”

You let out a small breath, something almost like a laugh under it, but softer.

“I missed you too,” you admit.

That one feels easier to say. More natural. Because now that everything’s out in the open… it’s obvious. There’s a pause. But it’s not awkward. It’s the kind that just… exists, comfortably.

You glance at him again, then step a little closer without really thinking about it. He doesn’t move away. If anything, he relaxes slightly.

“…We’re still gonna argue about this again, you know,” you say, a small, knowing smile forming.

“Probably,” he replies.

“You’re still stubborn.”

“So are you.”

“Yeah, but I’m right.”

That earns a quiet huff from him—definitely a suppressed laugh this time.

“Not always.”

“Most of the time.”

He shakes his head slightly, but there’s no real resistance in it anymore.

“…We’ll figure it out,” he says.

It’s not a perfect solution. Not a full resolution. But it’s honest. And for now… it’s enough.

You nod a little. “Yeah,” you agree softly. “We will.”

Another small pause. Then, without overthinking it, you step forward and wrap your arms around him. It’s not dramatic. Not rushed. Just… real. For half a second, Leo freezes—caught off guard. Then his arms come up around you, steady and warm, pulling you in just a little closer. Not tight. Just enough. Like he’s making sure you’re actually there.

You rest your head lightly against him, exhaling slowly as the last of the tension finally fades.

“…Next time,” you mumble softly, “maybe don’t wait a whole week to climb into my balcony.”

There’s a faint hint of amusement in your voice now. Leo exhales quietly, something softer than a laugh.

“…Next time,” he replies, “maybe don’t disappear for a week.”

“Deal.”

“Deal.”

Chapter 34: “SLEEPYHEAD” —ft. Bayverse Raphael

The lair wasn’t loud in a bad way — just full. Full of overlapping voices, electronic sound effects bouncing off concrete walls, Mikey yelling dramatic commentary at a racing game that absolutely did not require that level of emotional investment, and the occasional deep rumble of Raphael laughing whenever he knocked Mikey’s character off the track.

You had been trying to stay awake for the past hour.

Trying being the important word.

The couch in the living area had practically swallowed you whole the second you sat down. The old cushions dipped under your weight, warm from everyone constantly piling onto them, and the low lighting of the lair wasn’t helping either. Somewhere nearby, Donnie was working on something at his station, metal clinking softly every few seconds while music played faintly from his headphones. Leo was reading, or pretending to read, while occasionally giving tired older-brother sighs every time Mikey screamed.

“THAT WAS CHEATING!” Mikey yelled from the floor.

Raphael snorted without even looking at him. “That’s called winning.”

“You literally hit my car into a WALL.”

“Cry harder.”

You smiled faintly from where you were stretched out across the couch.

At some point earlier, without really thinking about it, you had ended up laying closer to Raph. Mostly because he radiated heat like a furnace. One massive leg was stretched across part of the couch, and your head had eventually found its way onto his thigh after he made room with a distracted grunt. Neither of you had acknowledged it.

That was kind of normal with Raph. He wasn’t overly verbal about affection. Most things with him happened quietly — protective hands on your shoulder steering you away from danger, silently handing you food before you asked, sitting close enough that your knees bumped. Things that sounded small until you realized he did them constantly.

Right now, one of his huge hands rested lazily near your shoulder while the other worked the game controller. His fingers tapped rapidly against the buttons, completely focused on destroying Mikey’s chances of victory.

“You’re targeting me specifically!” Mikey accused.

“Yeah,” Raph answered immediately. “And?”

“You’re toxic.”

“You’re losin’.”

You let out a tired laugh against Raph’s leg, your voice muffled. “Mikey, you’ve been in eighth place for like… twenty minutes.”

“That’s because your boyfriend’s a menace.”

Raph nearly choked. “Shut up.”

You could feel the vibration of his voice through his thigh under your cheek.

Mikey gasped dramatically from the floor. “OH MY GOD, HE DIDN’T DENY THE BOYFRIEND PART.”

“Keep talkin’ and I’m unplugging the game.”

“You wouldn’t dare.”

Raph’s hand moved absentmindedly for a second, large fingers brushing once over your hair before returning to the controller. The gesture was automatic. Distracted. Barely thought about. That somehow made it worse. Or better.

Your eyes felt impossibly heavy. You blinked slowly at the glowing television screen, but the colors were starting to blur together. The warmth underneath your cheek was dangerously comfortable, and every deep sound from Raph’s chest acted like some kind of sleeping pill. Even Mikey’s yelling was becoming background noise.

You tried sitting up slightly. It lasted maybe three seconds.

Raph noticed immediately without looking down. “You good?”

“Mhm.”

“You’re droolin’ on me, y’know.”

“No I’m not.”

“You definitely are.”

“M’not awake enough to defend myself.”

That earned a low laugh from him.

You heard Leo speak up from somewhere nearby. “They’re about five minutes away from passing out.”

“Three,” Donnie corrected absentmindedly.

“Two,” Mikey added.

You weakly lifted a hand without opening your eyes. “You’re all mean.”

“No,” Mikey said. “You’re just sleep deprived twenty-four seven.”

“I slept last night.”

Raphael looked down at you finally, one brow raising. “For how long?”

“…That’s private information.”

“Uh huh.” you could hear the smirk in his voice.

The game continued. Mikey kept complaining. Raph kept winning. Somewhere in the background, Donnie started arguing with Leo about whether some machine was supposed to be making that noise.

But all of it felt farther away now.

Your body had gone completely heavy against the couch, your cheek pressed more comfortably into the thick muscle of Raph’s thigh. His warmth surrounded you from every direction, steady and grounding. Every now and then, the couch shifted slightly whenever he moved during the game, but even that became soothing.

You didn’t even realize your eyes had fully closed until you heard Raph’s voice again, quieter this time.

“You seriously fallin’ asleep?”

You tried answering. What came out was basically a mumble.

Mikey twisted around from the floor to stare at you both before grinning. “Awww.”

“Don’t start,” Raph warned immediately.

“They’re literally using you as a pillow.”

“And?”

“And it’s adorable.”

Raph clicked his tongue, clearly annoyed at being called out, but he didn’t move you. If anything, he shifted slightly to make your head rest more comfortably against him. The movement was gentle enough that you barely felt it through your exhaustion. Your breathing slowed. The voices around you became softer. More distant.

Then finally, somewhere between Mikey yelling about another loss and Raph muttering insults at the screen, you drifted off completely with your head resting on Raphael’s thigh.

By the time the race finally ended, the lair had settled into that late-night kind of quiet. Not silence — silence didn’t really exist down there — but softer. Slower.

Donnie's tools had stopped clanking at some point, replaced by the quieter tapping of keys at his computer. Leo was still in the armchair nearby, though the book in his hands had lowered enough to reveal he'd been watching the entire living room instead of reading for the past ten minutes. Mikey remained sprawled on the floor with his controller in hand, dramatically complaining about how the game was "rigged against artistic people."

Raphael ignored him completely. Mostly because his attention had shifted downward. Toward you. You were fully asleep now. Not half-awake. Not pretending. Completely out.

Your face was pressed into his thigh, breathing slow and even, one arm loosely curled near your chest while the blanket someone had tossed over you earlier slid halfway onto the floor. You hadn't moved in almost twenty minutes except for the occasional sleepy twitch.

Raph stared at you for a second longer than he meant to.

"…Dude," Mikey whispered dramatically. "You are whipped."

Raphael immediately smacked the back of Mikey's head without much force. "Shut up."

"Ow! Leo, did you see that abuse?"

Leo barely looked up. "You earned it."

Mikey pointed accusingly at Raph. "He's looking at them all soft."

"I ain't lookin' soft."

"You tucked the blanket around them earlier."

"That was survival instinct. They steal body heat."

You made a tiny sleepy sound against his leg at the sound of their voices. Instantly, Raph's entire posture shifted.

"Hey, keep it down," he muttered.

Mikey stared. Leo noticed too, hiding a faint smirk behind his book. Because there it was again — that thing Raphael did around you that he apparently wasn't aware of. The carefulness. The automatic gentleness that looked almost ridiculous coming from someone built like a tank.

Raph sighed quietly after a moment, looking back down at you. "…C'mon," he muttered under his breath.

Carefully — absurdly carefully for someone his size — he leaned forward and slid one arm under your knees while the other supported your back. The couch creaked softly under the movement. You barely stirred as he lifted you. Your head immediately dropped against his plastron, cheek pressing into him instinctively.

The entire room went silent for approximately two seconds. Then Mikey lost it.

“OHHHHH MY GOOOOD—”

“Mike.”

“BRO IS CARRYING THEM TO BED.” Raphael shot him a glare sharp enough to kill a man. Mikey continued anyway. “Like a princess!”

“They’re asleep.”

“You said that like it explains everything.”

“It does.”

Leo shook his head, clearly entertained now. “You’re not helping your case.”

“I don’t got a case.”

“You absolutely do,” Donnie called from his workstation without even turning around. “Your heartrate literally changes around them.”

Raph froze mid-step. “…What?”

Donnie finally glanced over, entirely too calm. “Scientifically speaking.”

“You monitor my heartrate?”

“You live in the same sewer as me. I monitor everybody’s heartrate.”

“That’s creepy.”

“It’s efficient.”

Mikey was practically vibrating with excitement by now. “WAIT WAIT WAIT, does it get all romantic and stuff?”

Donnie adjusted his glasses. “Actually, yes.”

“DONNIE!”

“What? It’s data.”

Raphael looked one second away from launching a controller through the room. Instead, he tightened his hold on you slightly when your head shifted against him, immediately calming again the second he realized you were still asleep. That alone was enough to make Leo snort quietly.

“Yeah,” he said. “Totally not obvious.”

Raph muttered something under his breath none of them caught and started walking away before the teasing could continue. The halls of the lair were dimmer this late at night, lit only

by scattered lamps and the glow from Donnie's tech. Raph's footsteps were naturally heavy, but he still somehow managed to walk softer while carrying you.

Not because he thought he'd drop you. That part wasn't even a concern. It was more that he didn't want to wake you.

Every now and then, your face pressed a little closer against him unconsciously, sleepy and trusting in a way that made something in his chest tighten strangely. You looked completely comfortable there like it was the most natural thing in the world.

Raph wasn't really used to people trusting him gently. Usually people trusted him for protection. Strength. Violence when necessary.

This was different. This was you falling asleep on him without hesitation. Letting him carry you without even waking up properly.

His room was quieter than the rest of the lair, the low lamp near his bed casting warm orange light across the walls. Heavy metal posters, scattered weights, a punching bag shoved into one corner — the room looked exactly like Raphael. Except for the fact that he immediately softened the second he stepped inside with you in his arms.

He approached the bed carefully before lowering himself slightly, one hand supporting the back of your head the entire time so you wouldn't bump against anything. The mattress dipped as he laid you down. You shifted instantly at the loss of warmth, brows furrowing slightly in your sleep.

Raph paused. "…Easy," he murmured quietly.

His huge hands adjusted the blanket around you, pulling it properly over your shoulders after noticing your legs curling instinctively toward warmth. He even moved one of the pillows higher when your neck looked uncomfortable.

The whole process looked strangely delicate coming from him. Like he was terrified of disturbing you.

You made another sleepy sound and turned slightly toward where he stood beside the bed. Then, without waking up, your hand lazily grabbed onto two of his fingers.

Raphael stopped breathing for a second. Completely still.

Outside the room, there was a muffled sound of Mikey trying not to scream through laughter because apparently he had followed them down the hallway like a menace.

Raph didn't even look toward the door. His attention stayed entirely on you. "…Yeah, yeah," he muttered quietly toward the hallway. "Shut up."

…

When you finally woke up, the first thing you noticed was warmth. Not the heavy warmth from the couch earlier. This was steadier.

Closer.

Your body felt sunk into a mattress softer than the couch in the living room, thick blankets pulled over you while the air around you carried that familiar mix of metal, detergent, and something earthy that always clung to Raphael somehow.

Your eyes opened slowly. Dim orange light filled the room. For a few seconds, your sleepy brain struggled to process where you even were. The ceiling looked unfamiliar. So did the walls covered in posters, gym equipment, scattered tools, and the massive punching bag hanging in the corner.

Then your gaze shifted. Raphael was sitting nearby. The huge chair beside his bed looked ridiculously small underneath him, one arm resting across his plastron while the other held a comic book that clearly hadn't been turned in a while. His head was tilted slightly downward, expression calmer than usual in the low light.

Watching you.

The second he noticed your eyes opening fully, his posture changed immediately. "There you are," he said quietly.

His voice was rough from exhaustion, lower than usual this late at night.

You blinked slowly at him. "…Did I die?"

That earned the faintest snort from him. "Nah."

"You sure?"

"Pretty sure."

Your eyes drifted around the room again before settling back on him. "…Why am I in your room?"

"You passed out."

"I do that sometimes."

"Yeah, I noticed."

You rubbed one eye tiredly, still half asleep. "Wait… did you carry me here?"

Raph leaned back slightly in the chair, crossing his arms like maybe acting casual would somehow help him now. "…Maybe."

You stared at him. "Raphael."

"What?"

"You carried me to bed?"

“You sayin’ it like I committed a crime.”

A sleepy laugh escaped you before you could stop it. The sound visibly affected him. It always did, honestly. Raph tried to act tougher than he actually was most of the time, but around you, little cracks kept appearing in the armor. Tiny pauses. Softer expressions. The way his voice lowered automatically whenever you sounded tired.

You pushed yourself up slightly against the pillows, blanket slipping down a little. “How long was I asleep?”

He shrugged one shoulder. “Couple hours.”

Your brows lifted immediately. “And you stayed here the whole time?”

Another shrug. Like it was obvious. Like there was no other option. “I didn’t wanna move you again,” he muttered.

Something about the way he said it made your chest ache a little. Because he sounded almost defensive about caring.

Your sleepy expression softened as you looked at him properly now. He looked tired too. One elbow rested against the arm of the chair while his fingers tapped lazily against his bicep. The comic book in his lap had been forgotten entirely.

“You could’ve gone to sleep too, you know.”

“I’m fine.”

“You’re literally falling asleep sitting up.”

“I ain’t.”

Right as he said it, his eyes narrowed slightly in obvious exhaustion.

You smiled immediately. “Wow. Very convincing.”

“Shut up.” but there was no bite to it.

You shifted carefully, making room on the bed beside you before looking toward him again. “…C’mere.”

Raph blinked. “What?”

“You heard me.”

He stared at the empty space beside you like you had just invited him into a war zone. “You want me to—”

“Yes.”

“The bed’s not exactly built for the two of us, it can barely take only me inside.”

“You’re saying that like I haven’t seen you fold yourself into the couch like a depressed gargoyle before.”

That actually made him laugh quietly. A real laugh. Low and warm and tired.

For a second he hesitated anyway, like he was genuinely worried about taking up too much space or making you uncomfortable somehow. Which was ridiculous considering this was Raphael. The same Raphael who threw people through walls for a living.

Yet somehow he looked more nervous about sitting beside you than fighting armed criminals.

Eventually, with a quiet sigh, he stood. The mattress dipped heavily as he sat down carefully beside you, clearly trying not to crush the entire bed frame in the process. You immediately noticed how careful he was being with every movement, like he thought one wrong shift might disturb you.

“You know,” you murmured sleepily, “you’re weirdly gentle for someone who threatens people with sai.”

“Only with idiots.”

“Hm.”

You looked at him for another second before, without really thinking about it, you leaned sideways until your head rested against his shoulder. Raphael froze instantly. Not dramatically. Just completely still. Like his entire system short-circuited.

You felt the exact moment his breathing changed. “…You good?” you mumbled against him.

“Yeah.” he answered way too fast.

A tiny smile pulled at your mouth. His shoulder was warm. Solid. Comfortable in the same way his thigh had been earlier, except now you could hear the slower rhythm of his breathing underneath everything.

After a moment, one of his massive hands moved carefully toward you. Then stopped. Then tried again. Finally, awkwardly, his arm settled around your shoulders. Gentle. So unbelievably gentle. Like he was scared squeezing too hard might break something.

You melted against him immediately, still exhausted enough that your body relaxed on instinct. Raph looked down at you quietly after that, the usual tension in his face softening inch by inch.

Outside the room, you could faintly hear Mikey somewhere in the lair yelling about pizza. But in here, everything felt calmer. Smaller.

Your eyes started drifting shut again.

“You fall asleep this easy around everybody?” Raph asked quietly after a while.

You smiled without opening your eyes. “No.”

The answer hit him harder than you probably realized. You felt it in the way his arm tightened slightly around you.

Both possessive and protective.

His thumb brushed once against your shoulder through the blanket absentmindedly while he looked down at you with an expression nobody else got to see very often. Soft. Completely, helplessly soft.

“…Good,” he murmured.

Chapter 35: “TACTICAL” —ft. TMNT 2012 Donatello

Donnie had never really meant to talk that much around you. At first, you were just there. That was the weird part.

You didn’t show up in the lair trying to impress anyone, didn’t stare at the turtles like they were some unbelievable sci-fi miracle, and you definitely didn’t laugh every time Mikey made a dumb joke just to fit in. You were… normal. Calm. Comfortable. Like somehow the underground sewer base full of mutant turtles, radioactive chemicals, broken machinery, and the constant smell of motor oil didn’t phase you anymore.

And Donnie noticed that faster than he wanted to admit.

At first, it started small. You’d stand beside him while he worked at his lab table instead of sitting with April on the couch or watching Leo train. Most people eventually tuned him out whenever he got technical, especially Mikey, who usually looked like his soul left his body after the first scientific term.

But you listened. Actually listened.

“So if the crystalline compound destabilizes under heat,” Donnie explained one evening while adjusting wires inside a half-disassembled Kraang device, “then theoretically I can reverse the polarity before the energy discharge reaches critical mass.”

You were leaning against the workbench beside him, chin resting in your palm. “Wouldn’t reversing it too early fry the power source?”

Donnie blinked. “…What?”

“The power source,” you repeated. “If the current flips while it’s still charging, wouldn’t it overload?”

There was a pause. A genuine pause. Not because Donnie didn’t know the answer, but because his brain had completely stalled.

Usually, when he talked like this, people either nodded without understanding or stared at him like he’d started speaking alien. Even his brothers mostly waited for him to summarize things into “good” or “bad.”

But you understood him. Like… actually understood him.

“Well— yeah,” he said quickly, trying to recover while pretending his voice didn’t crack a little. “Exactly. Which is why I need to stabilize the core first.”

You smiled slightly. “See? That makes more sense.”

And for some reason, that stupid little smile hit him harder than it should’ve.

After that, it became a habit. You'd wander into his lab area almost every day now. Sometimes carrying snacks. Sometimes a drink. Sometimes nothing at all. You'd sit nearby while he worked, occasionally asking questions, occasionally helping organize tools, and sometimes just quietly listening while he rambled.

And Donnie… started looking forward to it. Way too much.

"So technically," he continued another afternoon while typing rapidly at one of his monitors, "the mutagen reacts differently depending on the host's molecular structure. Which means if I can isolate the unstable proteins—"

"You could maybe predict mutations before they happen?"

Donnie slowly looked over at you from his chair. You sat cross-legged on the floor beside a pile of spare machine parts, turning a screwdriver between your fingers absentmindedly.

"…You've been paying attention."

You looked up innocently. "You say that like it's surprising."

"It is surprising."

That earned a laugh from you. Not a mocking laugh either. Just soft amusement.

"I think your work's cool."

And that—
That did something to him.

Because people called his inventions useful sometimes. Smart. Dangerous. Complicated. Weird. But cool? The way you said it sounded genuine. Not polite. Not forced. Just honest.

Donnie turned back toward the monitor before you noticed the way his face warmed slightly.

"Yeah well," he muttered, trying to sound casual and failing miserably, "it is pretty cool."

You grinned immediately because you caught the tiny boost in confidence. He hated how much he liked that.

The thing was, working with alien technology came with disasters. Constantly. Most people panicked when things exploded in the lab. You didn't. Well— okay, sometimes you did. But you stayed. And that mattered more.

The first real accident happened late one night while most of the others were asleep. Leo was meditating somewhere, Mikey had passed out upside down on the couch, and Raph was probably punching something in frustration.

Meanwhile, Donnie had been working for hours trying to stabilize a Kraang energy cell. You were sitting nearby at the counter, flipping through one of his notebooks while he adjusted settings on the machine.

“Hey Don?” you asked casually. “This equation here— why’d you cross out the second variable?”

“Because it was wrong,” he answered distractedly. “The resonance frequency was interfering with the thermal output.”

“…So basically the machine would’ve exploded?”

“It wouldn’t have exploded.” A beat. “…Probably.”

You slowly looked up from the notebook. “Donnie.”

“I said probably.”

Before you could respond, the machine suddenly emitted a sharp whine. Both of you froze. The glowing blue core inside the device started flickering violently.

“Oh no.”

You sat upright immediately. “That sounds bad.”

“That is bad.”

The whining noise climbed higher.

Donnie rushed forward, fingers flying across the controls. “No no no no, the energy output’s spiking too fast—”

And then the machine exploded. A loud burst of sparks shot across the lab. You yelped, ducking instinctively as smoke filled the room and pieces of metal clattered onto the floor.

“AH—!”

“MOVE!”

Donnie grabbed your wrist and yanked you back just before another shower of sparks burst from the console. The lights flickered violently. Something small caught fire near the workbench. Then silence. Complete silence.

Smoke drifted through the air while alarms beeped weakly somewhere in the background. You coughed slightly, waving smoke away from your face.

“…So,” you rasped. “Still probably?”

Donnie groaned loudly, dragging his hands down his face in frustration. “Oh come on…”

You looked over at him. And immediately noticed the difference. His shoulders were tense. Jaw tight. The excited energy he usually carried while working was completely gone now, replaced with that familiar irritation he got whenever his inventions failed. Or worse— when they failed around other people.

“Donnie—”

“I almost had it,” he muttered, staring at the ruined machine. “The calibration was right. I checked it three times…”

“You didn’t know the core would overload.”

“I should’ve.” the frustration in his voice came out sharper than intended.

You stayed quiet for a second. Then you carefully stepped over some broken pieces on the floor and crouched beside the damaged console.

“Well…” you said slowly, brushing ash off one of the wires, “if it makes you feel better, I think only like… seventy percent exploded.”

Donnie stared at you. Then, despite himself, a short laugh escaped him. Small. Tired. But real.

“You have terrible standards.”

“Thank you.”

He shook his head, crouching beside the machine. “The energy converter’s fried…”

You leaned closer to inspect the damage beside him. “Can it be repaired?”

“Maybe.” He sighed. “The main issue is the capacitor.”

You pointed carefully at one of the disconnected components. “This thing?”

Donnie looked surprised again. “…Yeah, actually.”

“I’ve been listening.”

There it was again. That stupid feeling in his chest. Warm. Strange. Annoyingly nice. He swallowed quickly and looked back at the machine before you noticed him staring.

“Well…” he cleared his throat awkwardly. “If you hand me the insulated screwdriver, we might still be able to salvage some parts.”

You immediately reached for the tool beside you and placed it in his hand. And somehow, without either of you realizing it, the next hour passed with both of you sitting shoulder-to-shoulder on the floor surrounded by burnt circuitry, quietly rebuilding the machine together.

At first, Donnie genuinely thought whatever he was feeling would pass. That was what crushes did, right? They hit hard, made your brain weird for a while, then eventually faded into something less embarrassing.

That had basically been his entire situation with April for months. He’d tripped over his own words around her, tried too hard to impress her, panicked every time Casey got near her, and

spent an honestly concerning amount of time fixing his bandana before missions whenever she was around.

Now, though? Now something felt… different. And the worst part was that he didn't even notice it immediately. It was April who noticed first.

"You know," she said one afternoon while casually flipping through channels in the lair, "you haven't stared at me once today."

Donnie nearly choked on the drink he'd been holding. "I— what?!"

Across the room, you looked up from where you were sitting on the floor beside one of Donnie's scattered toolkits.

Mikey gasped dramatically from the couch. "OH MY GOSH. SHE'S RIGHT."

"I do not stare," Donnie defended immediately.

Raph snorted loudly. "Dude, you used to look at her like a dying Victorian man seeing sunlight for the first time."

Leo visibly tried not to laugh. April, meanwhile, looked more amused than anything. "I'm just saying. You've been weirdly normal lately."

Donnie opened his mouth to argue again—
Then stopped.

Because… she was right. Somewhere along the way, things had changed naturally. Quietly. So quietly he hadn't realized it was happening. He still cared about April. Of course he did. She was one of his closest friends. But that nervous obsession? The constant need to impress her? Gone. Completely gone.

And somehow, instead, his eyes kept drifting toward you instead. You, sitting cross-legged on the floor while trying to organize his tools into categories you only half understood. You, frowning in concentration while reading upside down labels on alien tech. You, occasionally muttering little comments to yourself that made absolutely no sense.

"This one looks emotionally unstable," you declared, holding up a glowing Kraang component carefully.

Donnie blinked. "That's… a battery."

"An emotionally unstable battery."

He laughed before he could stop himself. And that was exactly the problem. Everything about you felt easy. He didn't feel like he had to perform around you. Did he still panic internally sometimes? Absolutely.

But it was different from how he acted around April before. Less dramatic. Less desperate. More real. Which somehow made it scarier. Because now he actually cared what you thought

of him. A lot. And unlike before, he was careful. Very careful.

He stopped blurting things out impulsively. Stopped trying to show off every five seconds. If you complimented his work, he'd get flustered for hours afterward but try desperately not to show it. Which, unfortunately for him, his brothers noticed immediately.

"Ohhhhhh," Mikey whispered one evening while watching Donnie from across the lab. "He's got the REAL crush now."

"I do not."

"You organized your desk before she got here," Raph deadpanned.

"That means nothing."

"You changed shirts twice," Leo added calmly.

"That was because one had oil stains."

"You sniffed both shirts first," Mikey said.

Donnie froze. "…I hate all of you."

And honestly? April was relieved. Not offended. Not jealous. Relieved. Because for the first time since meeting Donnie, she felt like he was actually acting like himself around someone instead of turning into an anxious disaster trying to impress them.

She noticed how he relaxed around you. How conversations flowed naturally. How he actually listened instead of trying too hard to sound smart. And she especially noticed the way you looked at him. Like you genuinely admired him. Not because he was useful. Not because he built cool things. But because you liked him. As a person.

It was nice to see. Even if Donnie himself still hadn't fully figured out how deep he'd fallen yet.

Then the Kraang happened. And everything got worse.

It started small. Too small. That was the problem. One missing transmission. One strange energy reading. One abandoned warehouse that should've been empty.

Donnie remembered feeling uneasy before the mission even started.

"You sure this isn't a trap?" you asked while walking beside him through the dark building.

"Statistically speaking," Donnie answered while scanning the area with a handheld device, "it's definitely a trap."

"…Cool."

"But we've handled worse."

You smiled slightly. “That somehow wasn’t comforting.”

The others spread out through the warehouse carefully. Broken crates littered the floor. Flickering lights buzzed overhead. Too quiet. Way too quiet.

Donnie tightened his grip on his bo staff slightly. Then—

The floor beneath you suddenly split open. Everything happened at once. You shouted in surprise as mechanical restraints shot upward from hidden panels beneath the ground.

“WAIT—!”

Donnie spun around instantly. “Y/N!”

Metal arms wrapped around your waist before he could reach you. The Kraang droids emerged from concealed walls almost immediately afterward.

“Ambush!” Leo shouted.

The room erupted into chaos. Raph charged first. Mikey swung his nunchucks wildly. Laser fire exploded across the warehouse. But Donnie barely noticed any of it. Because the second he saw the Kraang dragging you backward, something in him snapped.

“LET GO OF THEM!”

The sheer fury in his voice made even Raph look over briefly. Donnie launched forward violently, slamming his bo staff hard enough into one Kraang droid to completely cave in its chest plate. Not disable.

Destroy.

The machine crashed through a stack of crates. Another Kraang aimed a blaster toward him. Donnie ripped the weapon out of its hands and smashed it directly across its head. Hard. Way harder than necessary.

“DONNIE—” Leo started.

But Donnie wasn’t listening. You were still struggling against the restraints as the Kraang tried dragging you toward an active portal device.

“Donnie!”

That did it. Pure panic mixed with rage so fast it stopped looking controlled. Stopped looking rational.

The next Kraang that got near him lost an arm instantly when Donnie struck it hard enough to tear the limb clean off.

“GET AWAY FROM THEM!” His voice cracked. Not with fear. With anger. Real anger. The kind that had been building for longer than he realized.

Another Kraang charged him. Donnie slammed it into the concrete floor so hard sparks burst everywhere. Even Raph looked startled now. Because this wasn't normal Donnie frustration. This was vicious. Cold. Focused. Like he genuinely wanted to hurt something.

The Kraang holding you activated the portal. Donnie's eyes widened immediately.

"No— NO!"

You reached toward him desperately as the portal started pulling you backward. And Donnie moved. Fast. Faster than anyone expected. He vaulted over debris, ignored incoming laser fire completely, and tackled the Kraang droid before it could fully drag you through. The impact sent all three of you crashing sideways. The portal destabilized violently. Electricity sparked everywhere.

Donnie grabbed you immediately, pulling you against him protectively while turning toward the Kraang with a look that honestly didn't even seem like him anymore. The Kraang paused. Actually paused. Because even they seemed to register the pure murderous fury radiating off him.

"You touch them again," Donnie said quietly, dangerously, "and I swear I'll dismantle every single one of you myself."

There was no awkwardness in his voice. No rambling. No nerdy panic. Just rage. Raw and terrifying.

Then he attacked again before they could respond. The second the last Kraang droid hit the floor, the warehouse finally went quiet.

Not completely silent—sparks still hissed from broken machinery, something burned in the distance, and Mikey was loudly complaining about almost getting shot in the shell—but compared to the chaos from seconds earlier, the stillness felt strange.

Heavy.

Donnie barely noticed any of it. Because you were still in his arms. The second the immediate danger passed, all that rage drained out of him so fast it almost made him dizzy. Adrenaline still surged violently under his skin, making his hands shake slightly as he pulled back just enough to look at you properly.

"Are you hurt?"

The question came out fast. Too fast. Before you could even answer, Donnie was already checking. His hands moved to your shoulders first, turning you slightly as his eyes scanned you frantically.

"Did they shock you? Did you hit your head? Are you bleeding?"

"I'm okay—"

“Your wrist.” He immediately grabbed your arm carefully. “They restrained you too tightly, there’s bruising already—”

“It’s really not that bad—”

“Not that bad?” Donnie repeated sharply, still visibly running on panic. “You almost got dragged through a Kraang portal!”

You blinked slightly. Because he sounded genuinely upset about it. Not annoyed. Not embarrassed. Upset. Behind you, the others were slowly starting to gather themselves.

“Wow,” Mikey muttered quietly to Leo while watching Donnie fuss over you. “He’s like… turbo worried.”

Leo nodded once. “I don’t think I’ve ever seen him that angry before.”

“Me neither,” Raph admitted.

And honestly? It was a little unsettling. Not because Donnie had gotten angry—everyone got angry. But because of how he’d looked. Usually when Donnie fought, there was hesitation somewhere in him. Even during serious battles, he still acted like himself: talking too much, overexplaining plans, getting flustered when things went wrong.

This time? None of that had been there.

The second he thought the Kraang were taking you away, something in him had gone completely cold. Even now, kneeling in front of you while carefully checking your arms for injuries, there was still leftover tension in him. Like his body hadn’t realized the danger was over yet.

“You’re shaking,” you said softly.

Donnie immediately pulled his hands back slightly. “I’m not shaking.”

“You are.”

“…Okay maybe a little.”

His voice sounded strained now that the adrenaline was fading. You noticed how quickly he was breathing. How wide his eyes still were. The poor guy looked seconds away from a complete nervous breakdown.

“I’m okay, Donnie,” you said more gently this time.

He looked at you immediately. And that expression…God. It hit you harder now that the fighting was over. Because underneath all the anger from earlier had been pure fear. Real fear. The kind people only felt when they were terrified of losing someone.

“You could’ve disappeared,” he said quietly. The words came out rough. Almost too honest.

“I know.”

“No, you don’t.” He stood suddenly, pacing a few steps away before turning back toward you. “Do you have any idea how dangerous Kraang portals are? If they’d gotten you through before I reached you, we could’ve lost your location completely. Their dimensions don’t obey normal spatial logic, and if the portal collapsed while you were still inside—”

He stopped himself abruptly. You could practically see the moment he realized he was spiraling. Donnie dragged a hand down his face, exhaling shakily.

“Sorry,” he muttered. “I just…”

His voice faltered. That alone told you enough. Because Donnie almost always filled silence when he was nervous. But now? Now he looked overwhelmed.

You slowly stepped closer to him through the debris-covered floor. “Hey.”

He looked up again immediately. And the second you reached for him, his entire posture softened without him even realizing it.

Your hand rested lightly against his arm. “I’m here,” you said quietly. “Okay?”

For a second, Donnie just stared at you. Then his shoulders dropped. Not fully. But enough. Enough to show how terrified he’d actually been.

“You scared me,” he admitted finally.

The honesty in his voice made your chest ache a little. Because Donnie usually hid behind jokes, rambling, or overexplaining whenever emotions got too serious. But right now he looked too exhausted to do any of that.

He just looked… relieved.

“You literally looked ready to kill someone,” you said softly, trying to lighten the mood slightly.

“That’s because I was.”

The response came immediately. Completely serious. Even you looked surprised.

Across the room, Raph snorted quietly. “Yeah, genius was goin’ insane over there.”

“I was handling the situation.”

“You ripped a Kraang arm off.”

“It was tactical.”

Mikey immediately burst out laughing. “Tactical?! Dude, you were one evil monologue away from becoming a supervillain.”

Normally Donnie would've argued back immediately. This time he barely reacted. Because his attention kept drifting back toward you every few seconds like he still needed visual confirmation that you were actually okay.

April noticed it too. The way he hovered nearby now. The way he kept checking your bruised wrist. The way he instinctively positioned himself between you and the still-sparking Kraang tech scattered around the warehouse.

It was almost protective in a way none of them had really seen from him before. Not even with her. And honestly? It looked a lot healthier. More real. Less like a fantasy crush and more like genuine care.

"You should probably ice that wrist when we get back," Donnie said suddenly, already slipping back into worried mode. "And maybe let me scan for any residual Kraang radiation exposure just in case."

You raised an eyebrow. "Residual radiation exposure?"

"The probability is low," he admitted quickly. "But not impossible."

"You're worrying again."

"I'm being thorough."

"You checked my pulse like three times."

"That was scientific."

"You also checked my forehead."

"…That was also scientific."

You laughed softly. And Donnie felt his entire body relax a little hearing it. Because that sound meant you were okay. Actually okay. Not kidnapped. Not hurt. Still here.

The realization hit him all over again so hard it almost made him sick thinking about how close things had gotten. You noticed the shift in his expression immediately. The lingering fear. So before he could retreat back into his own head again, you stepped closer and wrapped your arms around him carefully.

Donnie froze. Completely. His brain visibly short-circuited.

"You saved me," you murmured against him.

For a second he didn't move at all. Then slowly—carefully—his arms wrapped around you too. Gentle. Like he was still afraid you'd disappear somehow.

Behind you, Mikey silently clutched Leo's arm dramatically. "Ohhhhhhh my gosh."

"Quiet," Leo whispered back.

Raph smirked. “Finally.”

Donnie ignored all of them. For once, he genuinely didn’t care. Because right now you were safe, holding onto him willingly, and his heartbeat still hadn’t calmed down completely from the terror of almost losing you.

Chapter 36: “ROOFTOP MOMENT” —ft. MM Raphael

Your room was quiet in the way only late nights could be. Not peaceful quiet. Just heavy quiet. The kind where every tiny sound felt illegal.

Your bedside clock glowed 2:13 AM in dim blue numbers while rain tapped softly against the outside of your window. Your parents had gone to sleep hours ago, and the whole house had that tense stillness where even walking to the bathroom felt like a military operation.

You were half asleep already, tangled in your blanket with your phone slipping from your hand, when—

tap tap tap

You froze. Your eyes snapped toward the window. Silence. Then again.

TAP TAP TAP

Your stomach dropped immediately. Not because you thought it was a murderer. Because you already knew exactly who it was. You stumbled out of bed in a panic, nearly tripping over your charger before rushing to the curtains and pulling them open just enough to peek outside.

A shadow crouched awkwardly on the fire escape. Red bandana. Broad shoulders. Huge grin.

“Yo,” Raph whispered through the glass, waving once.

You mouthed, horrified, “WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?”

He shrugged like showing up outside someone’s second-floor bedroom at two in the morning was completely normal behavior. You unlocked the window as quietly as possible and shoved it upward. The cold air hit your face instantly.

“Are you insane?” you hissed. “My parents are literally downstairs.”

“Yeah, I know. That’s why I knocked soft.”

“Raph, you’re a giant turtle.”

“Technically I ain’t fully grown yet.”

“That is not the important part of that sentence.”

He leaned against the side of the window casually while you looked ready to pass out from stress alone. Up close, he looked different than he did during the day. Less loud. No brothers around. No chaos. No fighting. No showing off. Just… tired.

“You okay?” you asked quietly.

Raph scratched the back of his neck. “Couldn’t sleep.”

“…So you came here?”

“Yeah.”

He said it so simply that your chest weirdly tightened for a second. Like there had never been another option in his mind.

You crossed your arms against the cold air. “Raph, if my mom wakes up and sees you hanging outside my window, she’s actually gonna faint.”

“She ain’t gonna wake up.”

“You don’t know that.”

“She seems like a deep sleeper.”

“You met her once.”

“And I observed.”

You stared at him. He stared back proudly. Honestly, you had no idea how someone so physically intimidating could say things this dumb with complete confidence.

A floorboard creaked somewhere deeper in the house. Both of you froze instantly. Raph ducked downward so fast you almost laughed despite the panic. You turned toward your bedroom door, listening carefully. Nothing. After a few painful seconds, you exhaled.

Raph slowly reappeared outside the window. “…Okay,” he whispered. “Maybe you got a point.”

“Oh, NOW I got a point?”

“You always got points. You got too many points sometimes.”

You rolled your eyes, trying not to smile. The rain had mostly stopped now, leaving the city damp and glowing under scattered streetlights. Somewhere far below, a car passed through wet roads with that soft shhhhh sound tires made after storms.

Raph rested his arms against the windowsill. “I just didn’t wanna stay home.”

That got your attention again. Not because he sounded sad exactly. Raph rarely sounded sad. But there was something restless about him tonight. Like his body was too full of energy and thoughts and frustration to sit still with it.

“Did something happen?” you asked.

“Nah.”

“You sure?”

“Yeah.” He paused. “Just one of those nights.”

You nodded slowly. You understood that feeling more than you liked to admit. For a moment, neither of you spoke.

Then Raph suddenly straightened. “Aight. Come on.”

You blinked. “What?”

“Let’s go somewhere.”

“At two in the morning?”

“Yeah.”

“I literally just said my parents can’t find out.”

“So we leave.”

You stared at him like he’d lost his mind. “And go where exactly?”

Raph pointed upward. “The rooftop.”

You looked up instinctively. Then back at him. “…The roof.”

“Yeah.”

“Of my building.”

“Yeah.”

“Raph, that is actually insane.”

His grin returned immediately, sharp and confident and very him. “Nah,” he said. “It’s gonna be fun.”

“You are genuinely the worst influence I’ve ever had,” you whispered while pulling on a hoodie over your pajamas.

Raph looked offended from outside the window. “That’s not true.”

“It is literally true.”

“You know people who vape.”

“That is somehow not helping your case.”

He snorted quietly while you shoved your feet into sneakers as fast as possible. Your heart was pounding so hard you were convinced it alone would wake your parents. Every tiny sound felt amplified. The zipper of your hoodie. The squeak of your floorboards.

Raph accidentally elbowing the fire escape railing and immediately muttering, “My bad,” under his breath.

You climbed carefully out the window after him, trying not to look down at the dark alley below. The metal of the fire escape was cold and slightly wet beneath your shoes from the earlier rain.

The city felt different at night. Softer. The usual noise had faded into distant traffic and humming streetlights.

Raph climbed upward first, obviously comfortable balancing himself on narrow rails like some giant green idiot raccoon. Meanwhile, you were moving like your life insurance had just been canceled.

“You’re taking forever,” he whispered from above.

“You have mutant turtle balance. I have normal person death balance.”

“You ain’t gonna die.”

“That’s easy for you to say!”

Raph glanced down at you with barely concealed amusement. “You trust me?”

You frowned immediately. “That sounded suspicious.”

“I’m serious.”

You hesitated. “…Yeah.”

“Then keep climbing.”

Easy for him to say. You followed him up another level until you finally reached the very top platform beneath the roof access ladder. The ladder itself extended upward toward the building rooftop, disappearing over the edge.

Your stomach immediately twisted. “Oh absolutely not.”

Raph blinked. “What?”

“That.”

He looked upward. “It’s just a ladder.”

“It’s a ladder attached to the side of doom.”

“You’re dramatic.”

“And alive.”

Raph climbed onto the top platform and crouched near the ladder, resting one arm across his knee casually. “You really scared?”

You crossed your arms tightly. “I don’t like heights.”

His teasing expression faded a little at that. Not completely. But enough.

“Aight,” he said more quietly. “I got you.”

Before you could answer, he climbed the ladder effortlessly. Of course he did. Giant mutant turtle strength probably made this feel like stepping onto a sidewalk curb. He pulled himself onto the rooftop, then leaned over the edge to look down at you.

“C’mon.”

You stared up at him. “No.”

Raph sighed dramatically. “You’re impossible.”

“And yet you showed up at my window willingly.”

“…Fair.”

You approached the ladder slowly, gripping the side rails with nervous hands. The metal was freezing against your palms. You climbed two steps. Then stopped.

Raph noticed immediately. “You okay?”

“Nope.”

“You ain’t even high up yet.”

“That’s not encouraging.”

He disappeared from view for a second before kneeling near the roof edge again, this time lowering one arm toward you. Your breath caught slightly. His hand was a bit bigger than yours. Strong too. Not in a scary way. Just… steady.

“Here,” he said.

You looked between him and the drop below. “I swear if you let me fall—”

“I won’t.”

The answer came instantly. No teasing. No sarcasm. Just certainty. That somehow made your chest feel weird.

You reached upward carefully until your hand slipped into his. Warm. Way warmer than it should’ve been in the cold night air.

Raph's fingers closed around yours firmly, easily supporting your weight while you climbed the rest of the ladder. You could feel how effortlessly he held you there, like you weighed absolutely nothing to him. Still, he stayed focused the entire time.

"Careful," he murmured. "Left foot higher."

You obeyed automatically. The rooftop edge came closer. Your shoe slipped slightly on one rung and you made a startled noise. Instantly, Raph tightened his grip and grabbed your wrist with his other hand too.

"I got you," he repeated quickly.

Your heart nearly exploded. Not from almost falling. From how close he suddenly was. His face hovered just above yours now, red mask tails fluttering slightly in the wind. Even in the dark, you could see the sharp concern in his expression.

Actually concerned. Not joking anymore.

You swallowed hard. "I hate this," you whispered.

"You're doing good."

"…You sound surprised."

"I'm motivating you."

"You're terrible at it."

"Yeah, probably."

Despite yourself, you laughed nervously. Raph grinned immediately after hearing it, clearly relieved you weren't panicking anymore. With one final pull from him, you managed to climb onto the rooftop beside him.

The second your feet hit solid ground, you grabbed the front of his plastron instinctively.

Raph blinked down at you. "You alive?"

"Barely."

He laughed softly under his breath. Not the loud cackling laugh he usually did around his brothers. Something smaller. Closer. You realized your hands were still clutching his plastron. And that he hadn't moved away at all.

Your grip tightened against his plastron for another second before you finally realized what you were doing. Warm. Solid. Very, very close.

Raph looked down at your hands but didn't say anything about it. For once, he didn't tease you immediately. He just stayed there, steadying you naturally while the cold night wind swept across the rooftop.

“You good?” he asked quietly.

You inhaled shakily. “I think my soul left my body halfway up that ladder.”

“That means yes?”

“That means I survived.”

“Close enough.”

There was that small grin again. Not the cocky one he used around his brothers when he was trying to act tough. This one felt softer somehow. Sleepy around the edges.

You slowly loosened your grip on him, though your hands lingered against the smooth surface of his plastron for a second longer than necessary before finally pulling away.

Raph noticed. Of course he noticed. But surprisingly, he didn’t comment on it.

Instead, he stayed close while you carefully stepped farther onto the rooftop. The concrete was still slightly damp from the rain earlier, reflecting little streaks of city light beneath your shoes.

The view was honestly beautiful.

From up here, the city looked endless. Streetlights stretched into the distance like glowing rivers, windows flickered softly in apartment buildings nearby, and somewhere far away you could hear faint music echoing through the night air.

You wrapped your arms around yourself against the cold breeze.

Raph watched you for a second before speaking again. “You still scared?”

“A little.”

“That’s normal.”

You looked at him suspiciously. “You’re being weirdly nice tonight.”

“I can stop.”

“No, don’t.” The answer came out too fast.

Raph blinked. Then his mouth twitched upward slightly. “Aight.”

For a moment, neither of you spoke. Then suddenly, without warning, Raph lowered himself backward onto the rooftop with a soft thud, folding his arms behind his head casually.

The movement startled you. “You’re just… laying there?”

“Yeah.”

“On concrete?”

“I’m a turtle. I literally got built-in armor.”

“…Okay, fair point.”

He glanced sideways at you. “You gonna stand there all night?”

You hesitated before carefully lowering yourself beside him. The rooftop was colder than expected beneath your hoodie, but after a second, it wasn’t bad. Just strange. Strange in a good way.

You stared upward. The clouds had mostly cleared now, leaving patches of dark sky open above the city. There weren’t many stars because of all the light pollution, but a few still managed to shine faintly overhead.

For a while, the only sounds were distant traffic and the occasional gust of wind.

Then Raph spoke again. “Way better than staying inside.”

You turned your head slightly toward him. His eyes stayed fixed on the sky. Without all the usual movement and noise, he looked different tonight.

You noticed little things now. The tiny scar near his shoulder. The way his fingers tapped absently against his arm when he was thinking. The fact he kept glancing toward you every few seconds just to make sure you were okay without outright asking again.

“You really couldn’t sleep?” you asked softly.

Raph exhaled through his nose. “Nah.”

“Why?”

He shrugged one shoulder. “Don’t know. Brain wouldn’t shut up.”

“That happens to me too.”

“Yeah?”

You nodded. Silence settled again, though it felt comfortable now instead of awkward. Then another gust of wind swept across the rooftop, colder this time. You shivered slightly before you could stop yourself.

Immediately, Raph noticed. “You cold?”

“No.”

“You literally shivered.”

“I’m surviving.”

“That ain’t an answer.”

You rolled your eyes a little, but before you could argue more, Raph shifted closer across the rooftop. Not dramatically. Just enough that your shoulders almost touched.

Your heartbeat immediately betrayed you. “You’re subtle,” you muttered.

“I know.” The worst part was that he sounded genuinely proud of himself.

You huffed out a laugh despite yourself. Raph smiled faintly at hearing it again, then settled back against the rooftop beside you.

The city had gotten quieter. Not completely silent — New York never really was — but softer now. The streets below had thinned out, windows in nearby buildings were going dark one by one, and the wind carried that cold, late-night calm that only happened right before morning.

You and Raph were still laying side by side on the rooftop. Close enough that your arms brushed occasionally whenever one of you shifted. Neither of you moved away from it anymore.

You turned your head slightly toward him. “Can I ask you something?”

Raph glanced over immediately. “Depends.”

“On what?”

“If it’s weird.”

You smiled faintly. “Do you ever think about leaving New York?”

That caught him off guard a little. You could tell by the way his expression changed — not dramatic, just thoughtful. His eyes drifted back upward toward the sky again while one of his hands rested against his plastron.

“Huh,” he muttered. “That’s… kinda deep for two in the morning.”

“Sorry.”

“Nah, it’s fine.”

For a few seconds, he stayed quiet. Actually thinking. Then he shrugged slightly.

“Once.”

You blinked. “Really?”

“Yeah.”

His voice sounded calmer now. More honest than usual. “We got into this huge argument one time. Me and my brothers.”

“About what?”

Raph snorted softly. “Bro, with us it could’ve been literally anything.”

You laughed quietly.

“I was mad,” he continued. “Like… really mad. Thought they didn’t listen to me. Thought maybe I was sick of all of it.” His fingers tapped absently against his arm again. “So I packed stuff.”

Your eyebrows lifted slightly. “You actually packed?”

“Yeah.”

“What did you even pack?”

“Snacks.” you stared at him and Raph cracked a grin immediately. “And weapons,” he added. “Obviously.”

“Thank God. I was worried.”

He snickered under his breath before the smile slowly faded again into something quieter.

“I really was gonna leave though.”

The honesty in his voice made your chest tighten a little. You could suddenly picture it too clearly: Raph angry and stubborn and hurt, sitting somewhere alone underground with a backpack full of snacks, convincing himself he didn’t need anyone.

“But you didn’t,” you said softly.

“Nah.”

“Because of Splinter?”

“Yeah. Him too.” he paused again. “And my brothers.”

The words came out more quietly that time. Raph shifted one arm beneath his head while staring upward at the sky.

“They drive me insane sometimes,” he admitted. “Like actually insane. But…” He shrugged. “They’re still my family.”

You listened carefully while the wind moved gently through the rooftop around you.

“I dunno,” he continued. “Maybe one day we all do our own thing more. Probably happens when people get older, right? Different paths and all that.”

His voice carried this weird mix of maturity and uncertainty that fit him painfully well. Still a teenager. Still trying to figure things out.

“But right now?” he said. “I can’t really imagine not having them around.”

Your expression softened immediately. “That’s cute.”

Raph turned his head toward you so fast you almost laughed. “What?”

“That’s cute.”

“I did not say something cute.”

“You absolutely did.”

“No, I didn’t.”

“You talked about loving your family.”

“That ain’t cute. That’s normal.”

“You packed snacks before running away, Raph.”

“That was strategy.”

You laughed properly this time, and the sound echoed softly across the rooftop.

Raph groaned dramatically beside you. “You’re making me sound soft.”

“You are soft.”

“I literally throw people through walls.”

“And?”

“And that should cancel it out!”

“It doesn’t.”

Raph looked deeply offended by this information. You smiled at him for a second before your voice softened again.

“You say cute things all the time, you just don’t realize it.”

He opened his mouth immediately, probably ready to argue again, but stopped. Because you were looking at him differently now. Not teasing anymore. Just honest.

Raph’s expression shifted slightly. The usual confidence in his face weakened for a second under the weight of that look alone.

“…Whatever,” he muttered eventually, quieter this time.

But he didn’t actually argue back. The wind picked up again, colder now, and without really thinking about it, you moved a little closer beside him. This time, your shoulder fully rested against his arm. Raph went still for half a second. Then carefully — almost cautiously, which felt strange for someone like him — he shifted closer too. Not enough to make it obvious. Just enough that the warmth between you stayed there.

Chapter 37: “CRUSH CRASH” —ft. MM Raphael

The gym was loud in the way school gyms always were—sneakers squeaking, volleyballs smacking against palms, people yelling across the court like their lives depended on a PE grade. Raphael stood near the back line with his arms crossed, pretending he wasn’t paying attention to you.

Which was hard.

Because you were literally right there on the opposite side of the net, laughing at something one of your teammates said while pushing your hair away from your face. And every single time you smiled, Raph felt his brain short-circuit for half a second.

“Dude,” Mikey snorted from beside him, spinning the volleyball on one finger. “You’re staring again.”

“I’m not staring.”

“You’ve been staring since warm-ups.”

Raph shoved him lightly with one hand. “Shut up.”

Unfortunately for him, Donnie overheard too. “Ohhh,” he said immediately, adjusting his glasses with the most annoying grin imaginable. “This is a mating ritual thing, isn’t it?”

“It is NOT—”

“You wanna impress her,” Mikey sang.

“I said shut UP.”

Across the gym, Leo looked over from his team and winced. “Wow. He’s getting defensive. That means they’re right.”

Raph looked seconds away from committing homicide with a volleyball.

Coach clapped his hands loudly. “Alright! New round! First team to fifteen!”

Everyone shuffled into place. Raph rolled his shoulders back, suddenly very aware that you were watching the court now.

Okay. Okay, cool. This was easy. He just had to play normally. Maybe spike the ball once. Not too hard. Just enough to look cool. Athletic. Casual. Like he wasn’t thinking about it at all.

The serve came flying over the net. One of Raph’s teammates bumped it upward awkwardly. The ball arced high into the air, spinning slowly. Perfect setup.

Mikey immediately pointed at it. “Raph! Raph! Go!”

Raph sprinted forward. He jumped higher than literally anyone else in the gym could’ve managed, muscles tightening as he pulled his arm back. For one glorious second, he imagined this going incredibly well—you looking impressed, maybe smiling at him afterward, maybe saying something like wow Raph that was amazing—

Then he hit the ball. Way too hard.

The sound cracked through the gym like a gunshot. Everybody watched the volleyball rocket over the net at horrifying speed.

Straight toward you. Your eyes widened.

“OH MY GOD—” Leo yelled.

THWACK.

The ball slammed directly into your face. The entire gym went silent. And Raph’s stomach dropped all the way to the floor.

For a full second after the ball hit you, nobody moved. The sound echoed through the gym while the volleyball bounced away across the polished floor. You stumbled backward from the impact, hands flying to your face instinctively. One of your shoes squeaked against the floor as you nearly lost balance. And the entire class collectively froze.

“Ohhhh, dude,” Mikey whispered in horror.

Raph felt his soul leave his body. The panic hit him all at once. He hadn’t meant to hit you. He hadn’t even been aiming near you. He just wanted to look cool for like two seconds, and instead he’d basically launched a missile directly into your face in front of the entire class.

“Oh my god,” Donnie muttered. “He killed her.”

“I DIDN’T KILL HER!”

“You absolutely vaporized her, bro,” Leo said, staring across the net with wide eyes.

Meanwhile, your friends rushed toward you immediately.

“Are you okay?!”
“That looked painful—”
“Girl, your nose—”

Raph couldn’t hear the rest. His stomach twisted harder with every second you kept your hands over your face. You weren’t moving much.

Oh no. Oh no no no.

He'd messed this up so badly. His brain was already spiraling into catastrophe mode. Great. Awesome. Perfect. Now you were gonna hate him forever. You probably thought he was some violent idiot who couldn't control himself. Which—okay, fair enough—that wasn't exactly inaccurate.

He took one hesitant step forward. "Uh…" Nothing. You still had your hands over your face. Raph immediately felt worse. "I—uh—I didn't mean to—"

Coach was already hurrying over. "Everybody back up, give her space—"

Raph's chest felt tight. This was horrible. Why had he tried to show off? Why couldn't he just act normal for once? Then suddenly you snorted.

It was small at first. Almost like you were trying not to laugh. The people around you blinked in confusion. Raph blinked too.

Then your shoulders started shaking. And before anybody could process what was happening, you lowered your hands from your face with the biggest grin imaginable and burst out laughing.

Not fake laughing. Actual laughing. The gym stared at you like you'd lost your mind.

"That," you wheezed, still laughing, "was the coolest ball throw I've ever seen in my LIFE."

Silence. Complete silence. Even Coach looked confused.

Raph just stared at you. "…What?"

You pointed toward him dramatically. "That thing came at me like a cannonball!"

Mikey immediately lost it laughing. "SEE?!" he shouted at the others. "She gets it!"

"You almost died!" Donnie cried.

"It was AWESOME!"

One of your friends looked horrified. "You're bleeding a little!"

You touched under your nose casually, looked at the tiny bit of blood on your finger, then shrugged. "Worth it."

Raph genuinely didn't know how to react. Because this whole time, he'd been preparing for the worst. For tears. For yelling. For you getting angry at him.

Instead, you were standing there laughing like this was the funniest thing that had happened all week. And worse—somehow worse—you were looking directly at him while doing it. Not annoyed. Not upset. Actually smiling at him.

Raph could physically feel his brain malfunctioning.

“Oh, he’s gone,” Leo muttered quietly from the sidelines.

“Absolutely cooked,” Donnie agreed.

Raph ignored them completely. “You’re… not mad?” he asked carefully.

You looked genuinely surprised by the question. “Mad? Raph, that ball crossed the court at MACH TEN.”

“That’s not a real speed,” Donnie said automatically.

“It SHOULD be.”

You laughed again, rubbing your cheek a little. The spot was definitely going to bruise later, but somehow you still looked more amused than hurt.

Then you grinned at Raph. “You play volleyball like you’re trying to defeat a supervillain.”

Mikey nearly collapsed onto the floor laughing. Raph wanted to disappear into another dimension. But at the same time…

You thought he was cool. Somehow. Against all odds.

Coach sighed deeply, rubbing his forehead. “Alright. Since apparently nobody’s traumatized, let’s take five.”

The class slowly started moving again, conversations immediately exploding around the gym. But Raph barely heard any of it. Because you were still smiling at him. And somehow that felt way more dangerous than the volleyball incident.

By the end of PE class, the story had already spread through basically the entire gym. Every few minutes someone would walk past Raph and say something like—

“Nice aim, dude.” Or— “Bro turned volleyball into a combat sport.”

Which normally wouldn’t have bothered him. Except now every reminder came with the image of the ball slamming directly into your face at terrifying speed.

So despite the fact that you’d laughed it off earlier, Raph still felt guilty. Really guilty.

The locker rooms had mostly emptied by now, students pouring into the hallways while complaining about homework and sweaty uniforms. The noise echoed through the school corridors in waves.

Raph leaned against the wall outside the gym doors, arms crossed tightly over his plastron. Waiting. Trying not to look like he was waiting. Which failed immediately when he noticed you walking out with your bag over your shoulder.

And yeah. Your cheek was definitely bruising now.

The moment Raph saw the faint purple coloring beginning to form across your cheekbone, his stomach twisted again.

“Oh, crud,” Raph muttered under his breath.

You noticed him standing there almost immediately. “There’s my attempted murderer,” you said casually.

Raph groaned, dragging one hand down his face. “Please stop calling me that.”

“But it’s funny.”

“It’s NOT funny.”

You smiled a little at that. And there it was again—that weird thing that kept happening whenever you looked at him. That warm, nervous pressure in his chest. Raph hated it. Mostly because he had absolutely no idea what to do with it.

He pushed himself off the wall awkwardly and rubbed the back of his neck. “Uh… listen. About earlier.”

You immediately waved one hand dismissively. “Raph, seriously, it’s fine.”

“No, but like—actually. I hit you really hard.”

“I noticed.”

“I’m serious.”

“So am I.”

You stopped walking for a second and looked up at him properly. Not annoyed. Not dramatic. Just calm.

“It was an accident,” you said simply. “And honestly? I’ve had worse.”

Raph blinked. “Worse than THAT?”

You pointed at your bruised cheek. “This? Please. One time my cousin accidentally hit me in the face with a metal baseball bat.”

“…WHAT?”

“It’s a long story.”

Raph stared at you like he was trying to determine whether you were secretly indestructible. Because most people at school would’ve absolutely lost it after getting nailed in the face like that. He’d seen classmates cry over way less. But you?

You’d laughed. Actually laughed.

And somehow that made him like you even more. Not because you got hurt. Obviously. But because you didn't act fake about anything. You didn't seem interested in being dramatic or trying to get attention from it. You just… handled things. Like it genuinely wasn't a big deal. It threw him off in the best possible way.

You started walking again down the hallway, but Raph followed beside you almost immediately.

"You should still get it checked."

You looked at him sideways. "Raph."

"What if it's like… fractured or something?"

"My cheek isn't fractured."

"You don't know that."

"You literally hit me with a volleyball, not a truck."

"That volleyball was moving pretty fast."

You laughed softly through your nose. Raph tried very hard not to stare at your smile but failed miserably.

A group of students passed by, whispering to each other after recognizing the two of you from the incident earlier. One kid mimed getting hit in the face dramatically. Raph immediately glared at him. The kid walked faster.

You snorted in amusement. "You know," you said, "you look really scary when you do that."

"Good."

"But then you apologize like five seconds later, so it ruins the effect."

Raph opened his mouth then closed it again. Because annoyingly enough, you were right.

He sighed heavily. "Can you just let me take you to the infirmary?"

You tilted your head slightly, pretending to think about it.

"Hm."

"Please."

"…You're really not letting this go, huh?"

"Nope."

Another small smile tugged at your lips.

“Alright then,” you said finally. “You can escort me to medical care since you’re the one who almost sent me there in the first place.”

Raph groaned again. “I said I was sorry!”

“I know,” you laughed.

The two of you started down the hallway together toward the infirmary, your footsteps echoing quietly against the school floors. And despite how nervous he felt walking beside you, despite the embarrassment, the guilt, the fact his brothers were absolutely going to make fun of him for this later—

Raph couldn’t stop thinking one thing:
He really, really liked you.

Chapter 38: “TIME TO RELAX” —ft. TMNT 2012

The lair smelled faintly like engine oil, old pizza boxes, and whatever chemical disaster Donnie had decided was “completely stable” this week. You stood near the couch with your arms crossed while Mikey practically bounced beside you, already way too excited for someone who barely knew the full plan.

“A thermal pools place?” Mikey repeated for what had to be the fifth time. “Like… warm water? Steam? Fancy people in robes?”

You laughed. “Basically, yeah.”

“That sounds majestic.”

“It’s not majestic,” Raphael muttered from the weight bench. “It sounds suspicious.”

You rolled your eyes. “Why would it be suspicious?”

“Because humans don’t just sit in hot water together unless they’re weird or rich.”

“Or tired,” Donnie added absentmindedly from his workstation.

Mikey pointed dramatically at him. “Exactly. And we are extremely tired.”

Leonardo, sitting near the table while sharpening one of his katanas, finally looked up. “You got a job there?”

“Part-time,” you said. “Mostly cleaning, helping guests, organizing towels. Easy enough.”

Raph snorted. “You fold towels for a living?”

“And yet somehow I still contribute more to society than you.”

Mikey made an exaggerated “oooh” sound while Raph glared at you from across the room.

“You got jokes now?”

“I always had jokes. You’re just slow.”

Raphael opened his mouth again, probably preparing a comeback involving your height, intelligence, or general existence, but Leonardo interrupted before the argument could properly start.

“You said nobody would see us?”

You nodded immediately. “That’s the important part. The place opens later on weekends, but employees can access the pools earlier for maintenance. Tomorrow at dawn there’s basically nobody there except one old janitor who sleeps through half his shift.”

Mikey gasped. “A secret spa mission.”

“It’s not a mission,” Leo said.

“It could be.”

Donnie finally swiveled around in his chair. “Actually… thermal water could help muscle recovery.”

Raph looked betrayed. “Oh, come on. Not you too.”

“I’m speaking scientifically.”

“You’re speaking nerd.”

Donnie smirked. “And yet I’m still correct.”

You stepped closer to Leo. “Look, it’s safe. Private. No crowds. No cameras in the pool areas either. I checked.”

That last part clearly caught his attention. Leo leaned back slightly, thinking it over with the same careful expression he used whenever the team considered going topside. Every possible risk was probably being calculated behind his eyes.

“Do we need to take the masks off?” he asked.

“Just if you want,” you answered. “But if you stay in the steam areas, nobody’s gonna notice much anyway.”

Mikey was already fully committed. “I call the biggest pool.”

“There are no assigned pools,” you said.

“There are now.”

Raphael tossed the towel he’d been using over one shoulder. “You idiots seriously wanna go marinate in soup water before sunrise?”

“It’s relaxing,” you replied.

“We fight mutants and ninjas. We don’t relax.”

“That explains a lot, actually.”

Mikey nearly choked laughing. Raph pointed at you. “See? This is why I’m not going.”

“You’re absolutely going.”

“Nope.”

“Yes, you are.”

“No.”

“You literally complain your shoulders hurt every day.”

“That’s different.”

“You groan when you stand up.”

“That never happened.”

All four stared at him silently. Raph frowned. “Traitors.”

Leo sighed softly, already sounding tired. “If we do this, we go in and out quickly. No unnecessary risks.”

Mikey threw both fists into the air. “YES.”

“That’s not a yes,” Leo corrected immediately. “That’s a ‘maybe.’”

“It’s basically a yes.”

Donnie nodded once. “Statistically speaking, it was a yes.” Leo gave him a look. “Sorry.”

You smiled a little despite yourself. “Tomorrow. Before sunrise. I’ll meet you near the back employee entrance.”

Raphael crossed his arms tighter. “Still not going.”

“You said that three times already,” you replied.

“And I meant it all three times.”

…

The next morning, the city was still dark blue with early dawn when you waited beside the side entrance of the thermal pools building. Thin steam curled from vents along the rooftop into the cold air. The sign outside remained unlit, the entire place quiet except for distant traffic and the soft hum of machinery underground.

You checked your phone for the time again. 5:12 AM.

For a second, you wondered if maybe Leo had decided the risk wasn’t worth it after all. Then a manhole cover scraped open nearby.

Mikey popped out first with way too much energy for dawn. “We have arrived,” he whispered dramatically.

Donnie climbed out after him carrying a small backpack, probably filled with gadgets nobody asked for. Leonardo emerged next, scanning the street immediately out of habit.

And finally—

Raph pulled himself out last, looking deeply annoyed to even be breathing this early.

You grinned instantly. “Oh my god,” you said. “You came.”

“I got kidnapped,” Raph muttered.

Mikey pointed at him proudly. “Peer pressure wins again.”

The automatic employee door clicked shut behind all of you, sealing the cold dawn air outside almost instantly. Warmth wrapped around the group at once. Not overwhelming heat — just that soft, heavy warmth unique to spas and thermal places. The air smelled faintly like eucalyptus, minerals, damp stone, and clean towels. Low lights reflected against polished floors while distant water echoed quietly somewhere deeper inside the building.

Mikey’s eyes widened immediately. “Okay,” he whispered. “This place is rich-people heaven.”

“It’s six in the morning,” you muttered while leading them down the hallway. “The rich people aren’t awake yet.”

“Good,” Raph grunted behind you. “Keep it that way.”

Leo stayed alert despite the calm atmosphere. His eyes moved constantly — exits, cameras, doors, windows, reflections. Even here, even somewhere peaceful, he couldn’t fully switch off. Donnie, meanwhile, was fascinated by the architecture.

“They use volcanic stone for humidity retention,” he noted, lightly touching part of the wall as he walked. “Interesting.”

“You can tell that just by looking at it?” you asked.

“I can tell they use industrial-grade filtration too.”

Mikey pointed accusingly at him. “Bro cannot enjoy anything normally.”

“I am enjoying it.”

“You’re analyzing rocks.”

“That’s enjoyable to me.”

You hid a smile while guiding them through another hallway. Soft instrumental music played somewhere overhead, quiet enough to barely notice. The turtles looked wildly out of place here. Huge figures moving through an elegant spa before sunrise while trying not to be seen by humanity.

Honestly, it was a little surreal.

You stopped beside a wooden door marked with the men’s changing room symbol. “Okay,” you said, pushing the door open slightly. “This is yours.”

Raphael looked inside, then down at himself. "…We don't exactly have clothes to change into."

"Yeah, I noticed," you replied dryly.

Michelangelo immediately wandered inside anyway. "Whoa."

The changing room was massive compared to what they were probably expecting — warm lighting, rows of wooden lockers, benches, mirrors, folded towels stacked neatly along shelves.

Mikey touched one of the towels reverently. "It's fluffy."

"You sound emotional," Leo said.

"I am emotional."

Donnie was already inspecting the lockers with scientific curiosity while Raphael stayed near the entrance with his arms crossed.

"This place costs too much money," he muttered.

"You literally aren't paying."

"Still feels expensive."

You walked over toward one of the cabinets and grabbed several folded robes before tossing them toward the turtles one by one. Mikey caught his dramatically. Leo barely managed to grab his before it hit his face.

Raph stared at the robe in his hands like it had personally offended him. "…What am I supposed to do with this?"

"Wear it."

"Why?"

"Because it's a spa."

"We're turtles."

"That's not a reason."

"It's a fantastic reason."

Donnie carefully unfolded his robe, studying the fabric. "Hm. Surprisingly high-quality cotton."

Mikey immediately put his on despite it fitting terribly over his shell. "Oh dude," he said, holding the sleeves out. "I feel luxurious."

“You look ridiculous,” Raph answered.

“You’re jealous.”

“I absolutely am not jealous of the bathrobe.”

Leo finally sighed and slipped his own robe on halfway. It barely fit correctly, but it covered enough to make him look slightly less conspicuous. Slightly.

You nodded approvingly. “See? Now you almost look normal.”

“Cruel,” Leo said flatly.

You laughed softly before stepping backward toward the door. “Alright. Thermal pools are down the next hall, through those double doors. Don’t wander around too much.”

Mikey saluted instantly. “Captain understood.”

“That sentence alone made me regret bringing you.”

“Too late now.”

You pointed at them one last time. “And seriously — if you hear employees coming, hide.”

Raphael snorted. “Pretty sure hiding’s our whole thing.”

“Fair point.”

You hesitated for a second before lifting the robe still folded in your arms. “I’m gonna go change too. I’ll meet you guys in like… five minutes.”

Michelangelo grinned immediately. “Spa squad.”

Raph groaned out loud.

Donnie looked toward you. “Are there multiple mineral pools?”

“Yeah. Different temperatures too.”

His eyes lit up slightly. Leonardo noticed instantly. “Don’t start.”

“I wasn’t going to say anything.”

“You had the science voice ready.”

You shook your head, smiling to yourself as you started backing into the hallway. “Five minutes,” you repeated.

Then you disappeared down the corridor toward the women’s changing rooms, the warmth of the building settling around you while your footsteps echoed softly against the stone floor.

The women's changing room was quieter than the rest of the building somehow. Warm lights glowed softly against the mirrors while steam drifted lazily through the air from nearby showers. You changed quickly, tying the robe securely around yourself afterward even though it felt unnecessary.

Underneath, you were already wearing your swimsuit. The robe itself was oversized and warm, the fabric soft against your skin as you stepped back into the empty hallway.

For a moment, the entire place felt almost unreal. Silent. Still. The only sounds came from distant water and the low hum of the building's heating system.

You followed the corridor toward the thermal area, the air growing warmer with every step until steam began clouding the glass walls ahead. The double doors slid open quietly. And immediately—

"THIS IS THE GREATEST THING HUMANS HAVE EVER INVENTED."

Mikey's voice echoed through the room dramatically. You walked in to find the turtles already spread through the largest thermal pool. The room itself was beautiful in a calm, expensive sort of way — dark stone walls, soft amber lighting, steam drifting above glowing water. Small fountains poured continuously into the pools while condensation clung to the windows overlooking the still-dark city outside.

Mikey was practically melting against the edge of the pool. His arms were stretched out wide, head tilted back, eyes closed in absolute peace.

"This," he announced, "is my new home."

Raphael sat a few feet away from him, shoulders submerged in the water while pretending he wasn't enjoying himself nearly as much.

"You've been in here three minutes," Raph muttered.

"And I've evolved spiritually."

"You're an idiot spiritually."

Donnie sat near one of the bubbling jets, clearly fascinated by how the mineral water reacted with the heat system. He looked more relaxed than usual though, even if he was still analyzing things.

"The temperature consistency is impressive," he admitted.

Leo leaned against the pool's edge nearby, noticeably calmer than before but still observant. Even while relaxing, his eyes occasionally drifted toward entrances and exits automatically. Then Mikey noticed you.

"OHHHH," he said immediately, sitting up straighter. "There she is."

All three others looked over too. You walked toward the edge of the pool, loosening the robe slightly from around yourself.

“What?” you asked.

“Nothing,” Mikey grinned. “You just look like you actually belong here. Unlike us.”

“That’s because I work here.”

Raphael glanced toward your robe. “Humans really wear these things seriously?”

“Yes.”

“That’s embarrassing.”

“You were literally wearing one too.”

“Against my will.”

You rolled your eyes before undoing the belt of your robe completely. Leo looked away almost immediately out of pure instinctive politeness while Donnie’s brain visibly short-circuited for about half a second before he forced himself to focus very intensely on the water instead.

Mikey, meanwhile, had absolutely no shame. “Cool swimsuit,” he said casually.

“Thanks.”

Raphael looked significantly less awkward than Leo and Donnie, though he still cleared his throat roughly and leaned farther back against the pool edge. You slipped the robe off your shoulders and placed it nearby before carefully stepping down into the thermal water. The heat wrapped around your legs instantly.

“Okay,” you admitted quietly while lowering yourself deeper into the pool. “That actually feels amazing.”

“Told you,” Mikey sighed dramatically, already half asleep again. “The soup water heals the soul.”

“It’s not soup.”

“It spiritually is.”

You settled near them, warm water rippling softly around everyone while steam drifted overhead in slow curls. For the first time in a long while, the turtles looked… peaceful. No fighting. No running. No Kraang. No Foot Clan. Just warmth, silence, and exhaustion finally catching up to them.

Raphael exhaled slowly after a while, shoulders finally loosening a little beneath the water.

"…Okay," he admitted reluctantly. "This ain't terrible."

Mikey pointed at him instantly without opening his eyes. "HA. Witnessed."

"Shut up."

Steam drifted lazily across the surface of the water while the city outside slowly shifted from deep blue to pale morning gray. Nobody had spoken for a few minutes now. Not because something was wrong — just because the warmth had finally settled into everyone's muscles enough to quiet them down.

Even Mikey had stopped talking. Which honestly felt historic. He was half-floating near one of the bubbling jets with his eyes closed and his arms spread out dramatically like he'd achieved enlightenment.

"I understand everything now," he murmured sleepily.

Raphael snorted softly. "You fell asleep twice."

"And both times I saw the truth."

"You drooled in the pool."

"That was wisdom escaping my body."

Leo shook his head, though there was the faintest smile pulling at the corner of his mouth now. The tension he usually carried around his shoulders had eased considerably since arriving.

Donnie sat nearby with his arms resting along the pool edge, mask abandoned beside his robe for once. Without it, he looked oddly softer somehow. Less guarded.

"Heart rates decrease significantly in thermal water," he said quietly after a while.

Raph groaned immediately. "You were doing so good."

"What? I'm relaxing scientifically."

"That sentence physically hurt me."

You laughed softly under your breath. The sound made Raph glance toward you. You were floating quietly beside him now, eyes closed, your arms drifting lazily through the warm water while steam curled around you. The faint smile on your face looked natural — relaxed in a way he didn't usually see.

Not sarcastic. Not teasing. Just… peaceful.

Raph stared for maybe a second too long before looking away again. "You're gonna fall asleep and drown," he muttered.

Your eyes stayed closed. “That’s dramatic.”

“You literally look unconscious.”

“I’m floating.”

“Barely.”

You smiled a little wider. “You worried about me?”

“Don’t make it weird.”

Mikey immediately opened one eye from across the pool. “OH, he’s worried worried.”

“Mikey,” Leo warned without even looking at him.

“What? I’m observing.”

“You’re annoying.”

“That too.”

Raphael splashed water vaguely in Mikey’s direction, making him yelp dramatically.

“VIOLENCE. IN MY SPA.”

“You deserve worse.”

You laughed again quietly, still floating beside Raph. The sound lingered longer this time. Raph glanced toward you once more, more carefully now. The warmth had softened you too. Your shoulders weren’t tense anymore. Your expression had lost that usual alertness people carried around in the city. For once, you looked completely comfortable beside them.

Beside him. And honestly… it did something weird to his chest. Not bad. Just unfamiliar.

He sank slightly deeper into the water with a quiet sigh. “…Alright,” he admitted after a moment. “This place is kinda nice.”

You cracked one eye open immediately. “Kinda?”

“Don’t push it.”

“That’s the nicest thing you’ve said all week.”

“I said your cooking didn’t suck yesterday.”

“You said it was ‘survivable.’”

“That’s basically a compliment.”

Leo let out the smallest tired laugh from nearby.

Mikey pointed at him dramatically again. “Guys. Leo smiled. Write this down.”

“I hate all of you.”

“No you don’t,” you murmured softly.

Raph looked toward you again. You had closed your eyes once more, floating peacefully beside him in the warm water, smiling faintly to yourself while steam curled through the air around both of you.

Chapter 39: “STILL PRETTY WITHOUT MAKEUP” —ft. MM Donatello

The first time Donnie saw you, he thought you looked cool as hell.

Not in the dramatic movie way, either. In the very genuine, very teenage-boy way where he froze mid-sentence because you walked past wearing massive platform boots, nails decorated with rhinestones, lashes so long they almost brushed your cheeks, glossy pink lips, and enough makeup to make every other person in the area look painfully plain in comparison. You had leopard print on your sleeves, charms hanging from your phone, heavy blush across your nose, sparkly contacts, and this sweet perfume that somehow lingered long after you left the room. Mikey had immediately gone, “YO, THEY LOOK LIKE A POPSTAR,” while Raph whispered a loud “Damn,” and Leo nearly walked into a pole.

But Donnie? Donnie got obsessed. Not weird obsessed. Just… fascinated. Because you looked so confident. Like you had handcrafted yourself into exactly the person you wanted to be.

And honestly? He admired that.

After that, whenever you came around the lair or hung out with them in the city, you always looked the same level of put together. Perfect eyeliner. Heavy lashes. Shimmer under your eyes. Lips lined perfectly. Even your hair always looked styled, fluffy and curled and decorated with clips. Donnie genuinely started believing you just woke up like that. He never questioned it because, to him, makeup wasn’t “fake.” It was part of you. Like his goggles or Mikey’s braces.

So when you and the boys started getting closer, and eventually you and Donnie specifically started spending more time together, he never once asked what you looked like without makeup. It genuinely didn’t cross his mind. He liked you exactly as you were.

Which was why the sleepover became such a disaster for you. It started innocently enough. April was busy helping her dad with something, Splinter was out, and the others were doing their own thing. You had been hanging around the lair all afternoon already, legs tucked under you while Donnie showed you some fighting game mod he’d downloaded. Half the time he was talking trash at the screen, shoulders hunched forward intensely while you laughed so hard you nearly dropped your drink.

“NO, no, no, hold on,” Donnie complained, gripping the controller tighter. “That hit did not touch me. That was literally cheating.”

“You’re losing to a twelve-year-old online.”

“I’m losing to bad game design.”

“You just got kicked into a sewer grate.”

“It was lag.”

“You screamed.”

“I DIDN’T SCREAM.”

“You absolutely screamed.”

“I made a tactical noise.”

You snorted so hard your fake lashes almost lifted at the corners. At some point it got late enough that neither of you noticed until Mikey appeared carrying a bowl of cereal and blinked at the clock.

“Dudes,” he mumbled, chewing loudly. “It’s like… two in the morning.”

You stared. “What?”

Donnie looked over. “Oh.”

And then there was that awkward pause. Because your house was annoyingly far. And because the trains had stopped running hours ago. And, because despite how confident you usually acted, you suddenly looked weirdly nervous.

Donnie noticed immediately. He always noticed weird little shifts in you. “You can stay here,” he said casually, like it was obvious. “I mean. If you want.”

You blinked. “Seriously?”

“Yeah? Why wouldn’t I be serious?”

Mikey immediately pointed his spoon at Donnie with the biggest grin imaginable. “OHHHHH.”

“Shut up,” Donnie muttered instantly.

“I didn’t even say anything.”

“You were about to.”

“I was emotionally implying it.”

Raph yelled from somewhere deeper in the lair, “ARE THEY FLIRTING AGAIN?”

“NO!” both of you shouted.

Leo poked his head around the corner. “That sounded kinda synchronized.”

“GO AWAY,” Donnie snapped, grabbing a pillow and launching it directly into Leo’s face.

Eventually the chaos died down enough for you to settle in Donnie's room, though "settle" was generous because your anxiety was slowly starting to eat you alive. You had never stayed over somewhere without removing your makeup before. Usually you'd make excuses. Go home first. Wake up early. Anything to avoid people seeing you bare-faced. Not because you thought you were ugly exactly, but because the difference felt… vulnerable. Too vulnerable. Especially around someone you actually liked.

And Donnie liked you. That somehow made it worse.

At first, you tried to ignore it. You sat cross-legged on the edge of his mattress while Donnie rummaged through drawers looking for extra blankets, talking the entire time.

"You can borrow one of my hoodies if you want," he said distractedly. "Probably too big but whatever. Also ignore the second shelf if you open anything because Mikey touched my stuff with sticky hands earlier and I'm still mad about it."

"You're always mad about something."

"Correct."

You smiled faintly, but your fingers kept drifting toward your makeup bag.

Donnie noticed and his expression softened a little. "You okay?"

"Yeah," you answered too quickly. He tilted his head. You hated when he did that. He got all observant without even trying. "I just…" You hesitated. "I have to take my makeup off."

"…Okay?"

Your stomach twisted. Because to him, it really was just okay. No big deal. No dramatic revelation. Just makeup. Meanwhile you felt like you were about to expose state secrets.

Donnie finally paused completely when he noticed how tense you looked. His voice got quieter then, more careful. "Hey. You don't gotta freak out about it."

"I'm not freaking out."

"You're holding your makeup wipes like they insulted your family."

You looked down. Unfortunately, he was right.

Donnie sat beside you on the mattress, close enough that your shoulder brushed his hoodie sleeve. "You know I'm not gonna suddenly combust if you don't have eyeliner on, right?"

"That's not the point."

"Then what is the point?"

You opened your mouth. Closed it. Because the truth sounded stupid out loud. You had spent so long building this version of yourself — the hair, the lashes, the glitter, the lenses, the

nails, all of it — that letting someone see underneath felt terrifying. Especially someone whose opinion mattered to you way more than you wanted to admit.

And Donnie kept looking at you patiently, waiting. Not judging. Not pushing. Just waiting.

"…You've never seen me without it before," you finally admitted quietly.

He blinked once. Then shrugged. "Okay."

You stared at him. "That's it?"

"What do you mean, 'that's it?'"

"I mean—" You laughed nervously. "I look really different."

"So?"

"So what if you think I look weird?"

Donnie looked genuinely confused for a second before he leaned back against the wall beside the bed, arms folding loosely. "You know what I think is weird?" he said. "People acting like makeup changes whether someone's cool or not."

You looked down at your hands.

He continued, voice casual and honest in that very Donnie way. "You're still you. The makeup's just… decoration. Like customizing an avatar."

"That is the nerdiest way you could've said that."

"Thank you."

Despite yourself, you laughed softly. And that seemed to relax him too, because he nudged your shoulder lightly with his.

"Seriously," he murmured. "You don't gotta do all that around me."

Your chest hurt a little at how sincere he sounded. Because he really meant it. No hidden joke. No fake reassurance. Just simple honesty.

You swallowed hard, fingers tightening around the makeup wipe packet as you finally stood from the bed. "…Okay," you said quietly.

Then you disappeared into the bathroom with your makeup bag clutched against your chest while Donnie stayed sitting on the mattress outside.

The bathroom felt way too quiet. You stood there for several long seconds after closing the door, gripping the sink while staring at your reflection under the harsh light. Without the dim city lights or your phone camera filters or carefully styled angles, it felt worse somehow. Every feature looked softer. Smaller. Bare. Your lashes weren't dramatic anymore. The glitter

was gone. The heavy blush that usually gave your face that cute doll-like warmth had disappeared with the wipes sitting damp in the trash.

You looked… normal. And that terrified you more than it should have.

Slowly, you rubbed away the last traces of eyeliner from beneath your eyes, your skin slightly pink from scrubbing. Your hair had started flattening too, clips removed and curls loosened from the humidity. The whole process felt weirdly emotional, like peeling armor off piece by piece.

You kept imagining Donnie's face when you walked back out. Confused. Disappointed. Trying to act polite. You hated that your brain kept doing that when he had literally never given you a reason to think he'd react badly. But insecurities weren't logical.

You finally changed into the oversized hoodie he'd lent you, sleeves hanging way past your hands, and stared at yourself one last time. Then you took a deep breath and opened the bathroom door.

The lair was quieter now. Somewhere in the distance you could hear Mikey laughing at something faintly through the walls. For one horrible second you considered just hiding in the bathroom forever. But then Donnie looked up from where he was sitting on the mattress. And froze.

Your stomach dropped instantly. See. There it is. You knew it—

"…Whoa."

You almost turned around immediately. "I knew it," you muttered, hugging the sleeves over your hands. "I look weird."

"What? No." Donnie blinked hard like he was trying to reboot his brain. "No, that's not what I meant."

"You literally said 'whoa.'"

"Because you look pretty." the words came out so fast and so naturally that you just stared at him. Donnie stared back for half a second before suddenly looking very aware of what he'd just said. "I mean— not that you weren't pretty before. You obviously were. Are. Whatever. I'm messing this up."

A nervous laugh escaped you despite everything.

And Donnie immediately pointed at you like he'd won something. "See? That. Do that again."

"What?"

"The laughing thing. Means you're not panicking anymore."

"I'm still panicking."

“Well stop. You’re making me panic too.”

He said it so seriously that you snorted softly again. God. Why was he making this easier?

You shuffled awkwardly toward the bed, still keeping your face partially hidden in the sleeves of his hoodie. Donnie watched you the whole time, but not in a weird way. Not like he was studying what had changed. More like he was just… looking at you. Actually looking at you.

“You really think I look okay?” you asked quietly.

Donnie frowned immediately. “Okay?”

You shrugged helplessly. “Without all the makeup and stuff.”

He leaned back on his hands against the mattress, eyes narrowing slightly like the question itself annoyed him. “You know what’s crazy?” he said. “You think I only liked your face because it had eyeliner on it.”

“That’s not what I said.”

“It’s kinda what you said.” you opened your mouth, then closed it again. Because maybe it was.

Donnie sighed softly and scooted closer until his knee bumped yours. “Listen. The makeup’s cool. I like it ‘cause you like it. You always look awesome.” His shoulders lifted in a small shrug. “But you still look like you.” you looked down at your lap and he continued, quieter this time. “Actually, you kinda look softer.”

Your face immediately heated up. “Softer?”

“Yeah.” Donnie rubbed the back of his neck awkwardly. “Like… comfortable.”

“That makes no sense.”

“It does in my head.”

“That’s concerning.”

“Rude.”

You smiled before you could stop yourself. And Donnie noticed immediately. His expression softened too, just slightly, like he was relieved to see you finally relaxing.

“You really were scared about this, huh?” he asked.

You hesitated. Then nodded once. “People act weird sometimes,” you admitted quietly. “Like makeup is lying or something.”

Donnie made an actual disgusted face. “That’s dumb.” you laughed softly through your nose. “No seriously,” he insisted. “That’s actually stupid. It’s literally just makeup. It’s supposed to be fun.”

His gaze flickered over your face again, but gently this time. “And anyway,” he added, voice quieter now, “your eyes are still the same.”

That one hit embarrassingly hard. Your chest tightened so suddenly you had to look away. Because Donnie wasn’t smooth. He wasn’t saying things to flirt on purpose. That was the problem. Everything he said sounded painfully genuine.

The silence between you turned warm after that, the nervousness slowly melting away little by little until you finally sat fully beside him on the mattress instead of hovering awkwardly at the edge. Donnie immediately relaxed too, shoulders dropping as he handed you one of the blankets.

“There,” he mumbled. “Now you look officially sleepover-ish.”

“You say that like it’s a scientific category.”

“It is.”

“You just make things up.”

“And yet people keep thinking I’m right” you rolled your eyes, but your smile stayed.

For a while, neither of you talked much after that. You just sat there shoulder-to-shoulder under the dim purple glow of Donnie’s room, listening to the distant sounds of the lair while exhaustion slowly settled over both of you.

And eventually, after stealing one last glance at you curled up in his oversized hoodie with your bare face half-hidden against the blanket, Donnie smiled a little to himself and muttered quietly—

“Yeah. Still pretty.”

Chapter 40: “NESTING SEASON” —ft. rotTMNT Leonardo

The first time Leo cancels on you, you don’t think much of it. The second time, you start raising an eyebrow. By the fourth day of complete radio silence from him besides the occasional “busy rn ttyl,” you’re sitting on the edge of your bed staring at your phone with your jaw tight, trying very hard not to take it personally.

Because this was Leo.

Leo, who usually showed up uninvited through your window just because he “missed your face.” Leo, who called you dramatically in the middle of missions to complain about Donnie stealing his charger. Leo, who physically draped himself over you every chance he got like some oversized, clingy cat.

And now he wouldn’t even let you visit the lair.

At first you assumed he was injured. Then you assumed he was hiding from responsibility. Then maybe he’d accidentally broken something expensive and was avoiding everybody equally.

But no. Because Mikey still texted you memes. Raph still answered your calls. Even Donnie acted normal. Only Leo had vanished.

So eventually, after another dry, weirdly formal text from him saying, “Can’t hang today. Sorryyyy 😬,” you decided you were done trying to decode him alone.

Which is how you ended up standing outside Donnie’s lab while machinery buzzed loudly behind the sliding door. You knocked twice.

“Enter if you value efficiency,” Donnie called immediately.

The door slid open with a hiss, revealing the usual disaster of wires, screens, half-built inventions, and at least three things that looked mildly explosive. Donnie sat hunched over a workbench while he tightened something tiny with a screwdriver. Shelldon rolled past your feet carrying what looked suspiciously like a melted toaster.

Donnie glanced up briefly. “Oh. It’s you.”

“Nice to see you too.”

“You’re interrupting a critical calibration.”

“You say that every time I come here.”

“Because every time you come here I’m doing critical calibrations.”

Fair enough. You crossed your arms. “Okay, serious question. Is Leo mad at me?”

That finally got his attention. Donnie stopped working. Not dramatically. Just enough to tell you the question mattered.

"…No," he answered slowly.

"Then why's he avoiding me?"

Donnie looked weirdly uncomfortable immediately after that. Which, honestly, was more alarming than if he'd just said Leo got trapped in another dimension.

He adjusted the googles of his forehead unnecessarily. "He's not avoiding you specifically."

"That is not comforting."

"He's just…" Donnie grimaced. "…going through something."

You stared at him. "Wow. Mysterious. Helpful. Incredible work."

"I'm serious." Donnie sighed and leaned back against the table. "Look, this is gonna sound fake, but it's not fake."

Now you were concerned. "What happened?"

Donnie rubbed the back of his neck like he already regretted this conversation. "Okay, so, technically speaking, certain turtle species experience periods of heightened territorial and domestic instincts."

You blinked once. "…What?"

"Nesting season."

Silence. Then: "I'm sorry— nesting season?"

"Unfortunately, yes."

You actually laughed at first because there was no way. No actual way. But Donnie wasn't laughing. In fact, he looked deeply annoyed to even be explaining this.

"He gets like this every year," Donnie muttered. "Usually we can manage it before it gets too bad, but this time…" He waved vaguely toward the ceiling. "Well. You exist now."

Your face warmed immediately. "…Oh."

"Yeah. Oh."

You sat down slowly on a nearby stool, trying to process that information without combusting from embarrassment. "So what does that even mean?"

Donnie pointed the screwdriver at you lazily. "Means Leo's instincts are currently screaming at him twenty-four seven. He gets overprotective, territorial, clingy, emotional— honestly kind of unbearable. Usually he hides in his room because he hates feeling out of control."

“And he doesn’t want me seeing that.”

“Bingo.”

Something in your chest softened immediately after that. Because suddenly all those awkward texts made sense. Leo wasn’t ignoring you because he was tired of you. He was hiding because he was embarrassed.

Which honestly sounded exactly like him.

“So he’s okay?”

“Physically? Yes. Mentally?” Donnie tilted his hand uncertainly. “Debatable. Yesterday he hissed at Raph for touching a blanket.” you snorted and Donnie deadpanned, “I wish I were joking.”

“And you guys just… let him hide?”

“What else are we supposed to do?” Donnie said. “Every time Mikey tries to cuddle him, Leo wraps himself in blankets like a defensive burrito.”

That image nearly killed you. Still, despite the amusement, worry lingered in your chest. “Should I text him?”

Donnie considered that. “You can. Just don’t push him. He’ll come out when he’s ready.”

So that’s what you did. You gave him space. Even though it sucked. You stopped visiting the lair for a while because you knew if Leo really needed distance, the last thing he needed was guilt on top of whatever instinctive nightmare he was already dealing with. You still texted him occasionally — stupid little things, updates about your day, photos of things that reminded you of him — but you kept it light. No pressure. No asking when you could see him again.

Sometimes he answered immediately. Sometimes hours later. But every response felt strangely emotional underneath the jokes.

miss ur face :(
Donnie stole my good pillow btw. betrayal.
u still using that hoodie i left there??

The last one especially stuck with you. Because yes, you were. And somehow Leo replying with just “good” afterward made your stomach flip.

Then, nearly a week after this whole thing started, your phone buzzed at almost midnight. You were half asleep when you checked it.

Leon 🐢💙
u awake?

You immediately sat up.

You:
yeah. everything okay?

The typing bubble appeared instantly, then disappeared and then came back.

Leon 🐢💙
Please come over.

Your eyebrows lifted.

You:
Now?

Leon 🐢💙
please

The message after that came so quickly it almost felt frantic.

Leon 🐢💙
And uh
can u bring something that smells like you???

You stared at the screen.

You:
"…What?"

Another message arrived immediately after.

Leon 🐢💙
NOT IN A WEIRD WAY
well maybe a little weird
just PLEASE

Your heartbeat sped up despite yourself. Because beneath the jokes, beneath the awkwardness, you could practically feel how badly he needed you right now. So you didn't question it. You just grabbed the hoodie you wore constantly — the one he always stole whenever he visited — pulled on your shoes, and headed for the lair.

The lair is quieter than usual when you arrive. Not silent — never silent — but quieter. Somewhere deeper in the tunnels you can hear distant arguing, metal clanging, Mikey laughing loud enough to probably shake concrete loose, but the energy feels strangely subdued tonight. Like everyone collectively agreed to keep things calm around one specific turtle.

You barely make it down the fire escape ladder before Raph spots you from the kitchen area. "Oh thank god," he says immediately.

You blink. "That bad?"

Raph points toward the hallway leading to the bedrooms with the exhausted expression of a man who has seen horrors. “He bit me over a blanket yesterday.”

“…Actually bit you?”

“Like a raccoon.”

“IT WAS INSTINCTIVE!” Leo’s voice immediately shouts from somewhere down the hall.

Raph cups his hands around his mouth. “YOU GROWLED AT ME.”

“I SAID I WAS SORRY.”

“You hissed after apologizing!”

There’s a pause. Then Leo yells, deeply offended, “Okay, wow, way to bring up my lowest moments in front of my partner.”

You can’t help laughing at that, the tension in your chest easing for the first time in days. Raph points at you again as he walks past carrying a mug.

“Please go deal with him. Donnie says if Leo steals one more pillow from his lab chair he’s gonna lose it.”

“THE CHAIR DOESN’T EVEN NEED SIX PILLOWS!”

“THEY WERE MEMORY FOAM, LEO.”

You shake your head, smiling despite yourself, and continue down the hallway. The closer you get to Leo’s room, the warmer it feels. Not temperature-wise exactly — though that too — but softer somehow. The harsh industrial feeling of the lair slowly disappears under layers of blankets spilling out from beneath his door, dim yellow lighting leaking through the crack underneath.

And you hesitate for a second before knocking. Not because you’re scared. Just… nervous. Because Leo asking for you like that had done something strange to your chest. Because you still remembered the frantic speed of those texts. Because despite all the joking, you knew he must’ve been miserable to finally cave and ask you to come.

Your hand tightens around the hoodie you brought. Then you knock softly. Immediately, there’s movement inside. Rapid movement. Something crashes. A muffled curse.

“COME IN.”

The second you open the door, you understand why Donnie called it nesting.

“Oh my god,” you whisper.

Leo’s room looks insane. Blankets everywhere. Pillows piled into walls. Hoodies, sheets, soft clothes, random cushions stolen from who-knows-where. His mattress is barely visible

beneath what genuinely looks like a giant nest built by a touch-starved cryptid with access to several department stores.

There are fairy lights hanging crookedly along the walls. At least four plushies shoved into corners. One of Mikey's giant beanbags somehow incorporated into the structure like structural support. And right in the middle of all of it—

Leo. Curled under three blankets, shoulders tense, eyes locked directly onto you the second you step inside.

For a moment neither of you says anything. And then his entire expression changes. Relief crashes over his face so fast it's almost painful to witness. Not embarrassment. Not joking. Just pure, overwhelming relief.

"You came," he breathes.

The words hit harder than they should.

"Yeah," you say softly, lifting the hoodie a little. "I brought the—"

You don't even finish the sentence. Because Leo moves. Fast. One second he's across the room tangled in blankets, and the next he launches at you with absolutely zero dignity left intact.

"Leo—!"

He grabs you around the waist immediately, practically hauling you off your feet before you can react properly. You barely manage to laugh before he's carrying you backward like you weigh nothing, dramatic as always, and then both of you crash directly into the mountain of blankets behind him.

The nest swallows you instantly. Soft pillows everywhere. Warmth surrounding you from every direction. The mattress dips hard beneath the combined weight as Leo practically drags you into the center of it with desperate urgency.

"Okay— wow—" you wheeze between laughs. "Little warning next time?"

"No."

Leo buries his face directly into your shoulder before you can say anything else. And just stays there. You feel the shudder leave him slowly. Like he'd been holding tension in his body for days and finally let it collapse the second you touched him.

"Oh my god," he mumbles against you, voice muffled. "You smell right."

You blink once. "…That is the creepiest thing you've ever said to me."

"I know." He sounds completely unashamed. "I can't help it right now."

The honesty of it almost catches you off guard. Because usually Leo would joke his way around vulnerability. He'd turn this into flirting or sarcasm or some dramatic bit to avoid actually admitting how strongly he felt.

But now? Now he just clings to you tighter. Completely serious.

"I missed you so bad," he admits quietly.

Something in your chest twists painfully at that. You lift a hand automatically, rubbing slowly over the back of his shell. "You could've told me."

"I tried not to."

"Why?"

He groans dramatically into your hoodie. "Because this is humiliating."

You snort softly. "The blanket cave isn't helping your case."

"It's not a cave," he mutters defensively. "It's a highly advanced emotional support structure."

"Built from stolen pillows?"

"Those pillows chose me."

You laugh again, quieter this time, and Leo visibly relaxes at the sound. Actually relaxes. You can feel it happening little by little where he's practically draped over you now, one arm around your waist while he shamelessly steals the hoodie from your hands and immediately stuffs it into the nest beside him like treasure.

The whole thing should feel ridiculous. And it does, a little. But mostly it feels strangely intimate. Because Leo isn't performing right now. There's no cocky grin. No dramatic posing. No teasing little smirk after every sentence.

Just him. Needy, exhausted, touch-starved him.

After a moment, he finally lifts his head enough to look at you properly. His markings look darker in the low lighting. His eyes tired.

"You're not weirded out, right?" he asks suddenly, quieter now. "By… this whole thing?"

The vulnerability in his voice nearly breaks your heart. You stare at him for a second before reaching up and smoothing a thumb gently beneath one of his markings.

"Leo," you say softly, "you literally tackled me into a pillow nest within five seconds of seeing me."

"…Yeah?"

“I still came in willingly.”

That finally gets a grin out of him. Small at first. Then bigger. Then suddenly he’s pulling you impossibly closer again with dramatic intensity.

“Oh, you have no idea how much I needed to hear that.”

Chapter 41: “WHIMPERING” —ft. BAYVERSE Donatello

Neon lights blinked across half-disassembled screens, wires hanging like vines from the ceiling around his little corner of organized chaos. The smell of soldering metal, old pizza boxes, and energy drinks practically belonged to him at this point. And right in the middle of it all sat Donatello.

Huge shoulders hunched forward. Fingers moving impossibly fast over a holographic keyboard projected from the gauntlet on his wrist. Blue light reflected off the sharp angles of his goggles while lines of code flickered over the lenses. He’d been sitting there for hours already, barely moving except for the occasional twitch of irritation whenever something on-screen didn’t cooperate with him immediately.

“Okay,” he muttered under his breath, voice rough from disuse. “If you crash one more time, I swear to God—”

The monitor immediately glitched. Donnie stared at it. Then slowly leaned back in his chair with the exhausted expression of a man one inconvenience away from becoming a supervillain.

From the couch behind him, you snorted.

“I heard that,” he said without turning around.

“You threatened a computer.”

“It started it.”

You smiled a little to yourself, watching him rub a hand over his face. He looked tired. Not physically — not the kind of tired his brothers got after patrols and fights — but mentally drained. Donnie always pushed himself too hard in ways nobody noticed at first. He carried the responsibility of fixing everything, understanding everything, solving everything. Even now, surrounded by glowing screens and half-finished inventions, his shoulders looked stiff enough to crack.

“You’ve been here all day” you said.

“I took a break.”

“You walked to the fridge.” you raised an eyebrow.

“It counts.” he replied.

“It doesn’t.”

He clicked his tongue softly, still typing. “Very judgmental environment tonight.”

You got up from the couch anyway, crossing through the maze of cables carefully. Donnie didn't notice you approach at first — or maybe he did and just assumed you were grabbing something nearby. Either way, he only paused when your hands settled gently onto his shoulders.

He stiffened instantly. Not because he disliked it. The exact opposite, actually. You felt the tension packed into him immediately, hard as stone beneath your fingers. His muscles practically jumped at the contact before slowly, slowly giving way under the pressure of your thumbs. A quiet breath escaped him. His head dipped forward slightly.

"Oh my God," you murmured. "You're terrible at relaxing."

"I'm multitasking," he muttered weakly.

"You're decomposing in a chair."

"That too."

You laughed softly and kept going, fingers working deeper into the tight muscles near the base of his neck. Donnie made this tiny sound under his breath — barely audible at first. A restrained exhale. Then another. His hands stopped moving over the keyboard completely now.

The room glowed blue around both of you. And then it happened. A low, breathy whimper slipped right out of him. Not loud. Not dramatic. Just one startled, helpless little sound punched out of his chest before he could stop it.

The effect was immediate. Donnie froze so hard it was almost violent. Silence. Then he straightened abruptly in the chair, nearly knocking your hands away as he cleared his throat with painful seriousness.

"…Mechanical issue," he said flatly.

You stared at the side of his face. "…A mechanical issue."

"Yes."

"That came out of your mouth."

"No, it didn't."

Now you could see it — even through the dim neon lighting — the faint darkening across the exposed parts of his face. Embarrassment. Immediate, catastrophic embarrassment. Donnie refused to look at you now, suddenly hyperfocused on a random screen that definitely wasn't important two seconds ago.

You slowly smiled. "Oh," you said quietly. "That was cute."

"It absolutely was not."

“It absolutely was.”

“It was a vocal cord malfunction.”

“You whimpered.”

“I breathed incorrectly.”

You laughed harder this time, and Donnie groaned under his breath like this was genuinely the worst thing that had ever happened to him. Which only made it better.

He adjusted his goggles unnecessarily. “Can we erase the last thirty seconds from existence.”

“No.”

“Yes.”

“No,” you repeated, leaning down slightly closer to him. “Because now I know something.”

Donnie finally glanced back at you carefully. Suspiciously. “What.”

You tilted your head innocently, fingers returning to his shoulders just enough to feel him tense again beneath your touch. “That you make really pretty noises when you relax.”

The poor guy short-circuited. Actually short-circuited.

His jaw opened slightly before shutting again. His entire body locked up while the processors around him hummed louder in the silence. Somewhere across the lair, you could hear Mikey yelling about frozen pizza, but it sounded miles away compared to the way Donnie suddenly refused to breathe normally.

“You,” he said slowly, voice cracking once, “are enjoying this far too much.”

“Oh, definitely.”

Donnie groaned and dropped his face directly into his hands while you laughed behind him, still rubbing circles into his shoulders just to feel the way he kept trying — and failing — not to melt underneath your hands again.

Donnie tried to recover his dignity after that first sound. He really did. For the next ten minutes, he acted like nothing had happened. Like he wasn’t sitting unnaturally stiff in his chair while you continued massaging his shoulders. Like he wasn’t very obviously trying to focus on his screens while his breathing kept subtly hitching every time your fingers pressed into another sore spot. He kept pretending to type things just to seem occupied, but half the time his hands hovered over the holographic keyboard without actually touching it.

You noticed. And worse for him — you noticed exactly how sensitive he was.

“Relax,” you murmured behind him.

“I am relaxed.”

“You look like you’re preparing for surgery.”

“That’s just my face.”

You smiled to yourself. He was trying so hard to sound normal, but there was this tension underneath his voice now. Thin. Fragile. Like one wrong touch would snap whatever composure he’d managed to rebuild after embarrassing himself earlier.

Which, honestly, only made this more entertaining.

Your hands moved lower, thumbs dragging slowly along the heavy muscles near the middle of his back. Donnie sucked in a quiet breath immediately. The muscles there were unbelievably tight beneath his plastron straps, years of carrying gear and leaning over machines practically knotted into him permanently.

“God,” you muttered. “You’re a disaster.”

“I’m efficient.”

“You’re one bad day away from fossilizing in this chair.”

“That’s future Donnie’s problem.”

You laughed softly again, and he visibly relaxed for maybe half a second at the sound. That was when your fingers accidentally found the spot. Right between his shoulder and neck. The second you pressed into it, Donnie jerked. A sharper whimper tore right out of him this time.

Louder. Breathier. Absolutely impossible to mistake.

His entire body folded forward slightly in the chair before he caught himself with both hands gripping the armrests hard enough to creak the metal underneath his fingers.

The room went still. Donnie’s eyes widened behind his goggles in pure horror. You stared at the side of his face for one long second before slowly biting back a grin.

“…Oh, you are kidding me.”

“Don’t,” he said immediately.

“I barely touched you.”

“That’s irrelevant.”

“You whimpered again.”

“No, I—” He stopped himself, visibly flustered. “It was a startled reaction.”

“That sounded pretty needy for a startled reaction.”

His head dropped back against the chair with a low groan of humiliation. “You are never letting this go.”

“Absolutely not.”

And honestly? You couldn’t. Because there was something ridiculously unfair about this version of Donnie. Most people saw the giant mutant turtle covered in armor and weapons and assumed intimidation first. Strength first. The sarcastic genius with the deep voice and sharp mouth who always seemed one step ahead of everybody else.

But underneath all of that? He folded so fast under attention. Not openly. Not intentionally. Donnie still had too much pride for that. But every tiny reaction gave him away anyway — the way his shoulders twitched under your hands, the way his voice got rougher when you praised him, the way he completely stopped functioning whenever you touched him gently instead of teasingly.

And you’d be lying if you said you weren’t enjoying the hell out of it. Because seeing someone that massive melt in your hands a little? Seeing Donatello — stubborn, sarcastic, intimidating Donatello — trying desperately not to make sounds while you worked the tension from his body?

God. It did something to you.

“You’re smiling,” he accused suddenly, still refusing to turn around fully.

“I wonder why.”

“You’re evil.”

“You like it.”

“I tolerate you.”

“Mhm.”

You pressed that same spot again deliberately this time. Donnie immediately let out another broken little sound before clapping a hand over his own mouth in genuine disbelief, goggles practically flashing blue from how fast his systems reacted.

You nearly lost it laughing. “Oh my God,” you whispered. “There it is again.”

“This is slander.”

“You are literally whining.”

“I am not whining.”

Another slow press of your fingers. Another helpless noise punched out of him. Donnie looked seconds away from throwing himself directly into the East River.

Meanwhile, you were having the time of your life watching this giant six-foot-something turtle absolutely crumble because somebody rubbed his shoulders correctly.

And Donnie was never going to recover from this.

That much became obvious the moment you leaned closer again and felt him tense underneath your hands before you'd even touched him properly. He knew exactly what you were doing now. Knew you'd realized how reactive he was, and worse, that you enjoyed it.

And Donnie hated losing control of a situation. Unfortunately for him, he was also very bad at stopping you once you got like this.

"You're impossible," he muttered, still staring stubbornly at one of his screens even though nothing was moving on it anymore.

"You keep making cute noises. What did you expect."

"They are not cute."

"They absolutely are."

A defeated groan rumbled out of his chest, low and embarrassed, and you smiled immediately because there it was again — that subtle yielding underneath all the attitude. The thing nobody else really noticed about him. Donnie barked sarcasm and confidence at the world constantly, but the second somebody cornered him with genuine attention? Genuine affection?

He folded. Slowly. Reluctantly. But completely.

You moved before he could overthink it. One second you were standing behind the chair, and the next you were climbing carefully into his lap, settling sideways across the broad space of his thighs. The gaming chair creaked underneath both your weight and his immediate panic.

Donnie froze so hard he almost stopped breathing. "Wha—"

His hands hovered awkwardly near your waist without actually touching you, like he couldn't decide whether holding you would make this better or catastrophically worse. His goggles flickered faintly blue while he stared at you with wide eyes.

And suddenly the giant mutant turtle built like a tank looked painfully shy.

"You're blushing again," you murmured.

"I am not."

"You literally are."

"That could be a heat response."

"Donnie."

“Fine,” he muttered. “Maybe a little.”

You had to physically stop yourself from laughing too hard because God, this was unreal. The same Donatello who could threaten criminals without blinking was now avoiding eye contact because you were sitting in his lap. Your hands slid slowly up his chest harness, fingers brushing against the straps there. He inhaled sharply immediately.

“There it is,” you said softly.

His face somehow got darker. “You are enjoying this way too much.”

“Maybe because you’re adorable when you get flustered.”

“I am many things,” he said weakly, “but adorable is not one of them.”

You tilted your head. “You whimpered because I rubbed your shoulders.”

“That was a biological accident.”

You grinned. Then leaned closer until your forehead nearly touched his.

“Tell me something,” you murmured quietly.

Donnie swallowed. “What.”

“What other sounds can you make?”

The poor guy completely malfunctioned. Actually malfunctioned. His mouth opened. Closed. Opened again. Every coherent thought visibly abandoned him while he stared at you in absolute stunned silence. One massive hand finally settled hesitantly against your side, almost unsure of itself.

“You can’t just say things like that,” he said finally, voice rougher now.

“Why not?”

“Because—” He stopped, visibly flustered beyond repair. “Because you know what you’re doing.”

“Oh, I definitely know.”

And that was the problem. You were too confident about it now. Too aware of the effect you were having on him. Donnie shifted slightly underneath you, huge shoulders tightening while he tried desperately to regain some composure. But every time your fingers brushed him, every time your voice softened like that, another crack formed in whatever dignity he still had left.

“You’re being mean,” he muttered quietly.

But there was no real bite to it. If anything, he sounded almost nervous. You noticed that too.

“Am I?”

“Yes.”

“And yet you’re not telling me to move.”

That shut him up instantly. Because he wasn’t. Not even close. If anything, the hand at your waist tightened slightly, almost instinctive. Careful. Tentative. Like despite all his embarrassment, despite how overwhelmed he clearly was, he still wanted you there.

The realization softened something in your chest for a moment. Then you watched him glance away again after accidentally making another tiny sound when your thumb brushed the underside of his jaw, and the affection mixed immediately with amusement all over again.

“Oh, you’re gone,” you whispered with a grin.

“I hate you.”

“No, you don’t.”

Donnie looked back at you finally, flustered beyond belief, shoulders tense, face warm, absolutely trapped underneath the weight of your attention. And very quietly, almost painfully honest, he muttered:

“…No. I really don’t.”

Chapter 42: “Sexual tension” —ft. BAYVERSE Raphael

You rolled your shoulders once as you stepped onto the mat, tightening the wraps around your knuckles while the turtles lingered nearby.

“Okay,” Mikey said around a mouthful of chips, “before this starts, I just wanna say I support women’s rights and women’s wrongs.”

Leo sighed from where he leaned against a railing. “Why are you like this?”

“Natural talent.”

Across the room, Raph snorted quietly. That alone almost distracted you. Almost. Because the second he stepped fully into the light of the training area, your focus narrowed dangerously. He was enormous up close. Bigger than any person had a right to be. Broad shoulders wrapped in worn straps, muscles shifting underneath rough green skin scarred from years of fights you probably couldn’t even imagine. Even standing still, he looked dangerous. Like contained violence.

And somehow that only made the tension worse. You had noticed it weeks ago. The staring. The way his hand lingered too long at your waist when helping you over debris during missions. The way your pulse jumped whenever he got in your space. The way Raph suddenly got quieter around you compared to everyone else — except the silence between you never felt awkward.

It felt loaded. Like a wire stretched too tight.

Raph grabbed a pair of sparring gloves and tossed one set toward you. “You sure about this?”

You caught them easily. “What, scared?”

His eyes lifted immediately. There it was again. That look. Dark. Focused. Slow. Not annoyed. Not playful. Just fixed directly onto you in a way that made your stomach tighten before your brain could catch up.

“You asked me not to go easy,” he muttered.

“And I meant it.”

From the side of the room, Donnie looked up from his tablet. “Statistically speaking, this is a terrible idea.”

“Nobody asked, Don.”

“History will remember that I tried.”

You smirked faintly as you stepped onto the mat fully, bouncing lightly on your feet. Raph moved opposite you, cracking his neck once. The movement alone was unfairly attractive.

Everything he did somehow looked rough and controlled at the same time.

Leo crossed his arms. “Keep it clean.” Raph looked at him and Leo paused. “…Mostly clean.”

The fight started fast. You lunged first. Raph blocked easily — too easily — your fist hitting his forearm with a dull impact before he twisted sideways and shoved you back just enough to create distance. He was holding back. Obviously. Even now.

You wiped your mouth with the back of your hand. “Seriously?”

His brow furrowed. “You came at me like a damn squirrel.”

“Bang me properly.”

Mikey choked on a chip somewhere behind you. “OH MY GOD—”

“Not like that,” you snapped. Raph’s mouth twitched. Tiny. Barely there. But you saw it. And that almost annoyed you more.

You rushed him again, faster this time, ducking under his arm before aiming a hit toward his ribs. He caught your wrist before impact. Instantly. Effortlessly. His hand wrapped almost entirely around your forearm.

And everything paused. Not the fight. Not really. But something in the air shifted. Your breathing caught before you could stop it. Raph noticed. You knew he did because his grip tightened just slightly. Not enough to hurt. Enough to feel.

His face was close now. Way too close. You could see tiny scratches over his plastron, the faint rise and fall of his chest, the sharp focus in his eyes as he looked down at you like he was trying very hard to think about literally anything else.

“You’re hesitating,” he said quietly.

You swallowed once. “You wish.”

The next movement happened suddenly. Raph hooked a leg behind yours and sent you crashing onto the mat with a sharp grunt, your back hitting the floor hard enough to knock air from your lungs. Before you could recover, he was already over you, pinning your wrists down instinctively.

The room went silent. Completely silent. Because now everybody else was noticing it too. The tension. The fact neither of you moved immediately.

Raph froze above you. Massive. Warm. Breathing heavier than before. His knees trapped your legs without effort, and the position should have felt ridiculous during training — except it didn’t. Not with the way his eyes locked onto yours afterward.

Your pulse was loud enough to be embarrassing. He leaned closer unconsciously, probably not even realizing he was doing it.

“Still want me not to go soft?” he asked.

His voice came out rougher than usual. You hated how much you liked that.

Your chin lifted slightly despite the heat crawling up your neck. “That all you got?”

Mikey whispered a scandalized, “Oh they wanna kill and kiss each other.”

Leo smacked the back of his head immediately.

Raph finally blinked like he remembered everyone else existed. He released your wrists quickly and stood, offering a hand toward you without speaking. You stared at it for a second. Big hand. Scarred knuckles. Wrapped fingers flexing once impatiently. Then you took it.

Huge mistake.

Because the second he pulled you up, your body collided briefly against his chest from the force, and for one painfully long moment neither of you stepped away. Your hands landed against his plastron automatically. Raph looked down at them. Then at you. The air felt thick. Dangerously thick. And when his thumb brushed against your wrist accidentally — or maybe not accidentally at all — the look he gave you afterward nearly burned straight through you.

“Again,” you said softly.

Raph’s jaw tightened. “Yeah,” he muttered. “Again.”

The second round started rougher. Not faster. Not louder. Just heavier somehow. Like both of you had stopped pretending this was only about training.

The air in the dojo had changed after that moment on the floor, and everybody knew it. Even Donnie kept glancing up from his tablet every few seconds with visible concern, like he was trying to calculate how long it would take before this turned into either a fistfight or a makeout session.

Probably both.

Raph circled you slowly across the mat, shoulders loose now, eyes fixed directly on you in a way that made it impossible to think straight. He looked almost amused suddenly. Dangerous, but amused. Like he’d finally realized you were pushing him on purpose.

And maybe you were. Your heartbeat still hadn’t recovered from before.

“C’mon,” you muttered, motioning him closer. “Thought you were supposed to be scary.”

“Oh, I am.”

His voice dropped low enough that your stomach flipped instantly. Then he moved. You barely dodged the first grab, twisting away before his arm could catch your waist. The second attempt almost worked — huge hand brushing your side hard enough to make heat spark

under your skin — but you ducked under him quickly, using his momentum against him the way Leo had taught you months ago.

Raph hit the mat with a loud thud.

Mikey stood up immediately. “OH SHE GOT HIM—”

“Sit down,” Leo said without taking his eyes off the fight.

You didn’t even fully process what happened until you realized you were on top of him. Actually on top of him. Your knees pinned against either side of his waist, one hand planted on his chest to steady yourself while the other kept his wrist trapped against the mat.

Silence hit the room again. Raph stared up at you. You stared down at him. Neither of you moved.

Honestly, you probably should have gotten off him immediately. That would’ve been the normal thing to do. Smart thing too, considering the fact your thighs were pressed against his sides and his breathing had noticeably changed underneath you.

But then something reckless kicked in. Maybe it was the adrenaline. Maybe it was the fact Raph looked genuinely caught off guard for once.

You smirked slightly, leaning down just enough to stay in his space. “What happened?” you asked softly. “Thought you said you were scary.”

For one glorious second, you genuinely expected him to get flustered. Expected him to look away. Maybe grumble something defensive. Instead, Raph’s expression changed completely. Slowly. That rough little smirk appeared at the corner of his mouth. And your confidence immediately became a problem.

“Oh,” he muttered, voice low and gravelly beneath you, “you think you’re real funny now, huh?”

Your pulse jumped. His free hand slid upward suddenly, large palm settling against your thigh like it belonged there. Warm. Heavy. Not moving away.

You sucked in a breath before you could stop yourself. Raph noticed instantly. Of course he did.

“Oh, there it is,” he said quietly, smirk widening.

Mikey made a horrified noise somewhere in the background. “I feel like I’m watching something illegal.”

Donnie adjusted his goggles without looking up. “Biologically speaking, this was inevitable.”

“Can everybody shut up?” Leo muttered.

You ignored them completely because Raph's hand was still on your thigh. And now your hand was still on his chest. You could feel how solid he was underneath you — the rise and fall of his breathing, the heat radiating off him, the faint flex of muscle every time your weight shifted slightly in his lap.

His lap. God.

You forced yourself to stay cocky anyway. Leaning a little closer, you tilted your head. "You gonna tap out?"

Raph laughed once under his breath. Actually laughed. It was low and rough and unfairly attractive. Then, without warning, both his hands landed on your waist. Your breath caught hard. Because unlike before, this time it wasn't instinctive sparring contact. This was deliberate.

His fingers spread slowly against your sides, huge enough that he could practically hold your entire waist in place with no effort at all. The grip wasn't rough, but it was firm enough to make the power difference painfully obvious. And Raph knew exactly what he was doing now.

"You talk a lot when you're winning," he murmured.

You swallowed. "You complaining?"

"Nah." His eyes dragged slowly over your face before settling back on your lips for half a second too long. "Kinda like it."

That nearly destroyed you on the spot. The tension snapped tighter immediately, both of you frozen there in the middle of the mat while everybody else collectively pretended not to stare.

Raph's thumbs brushed lightly against your waist. Tiny movement. Tiny. But it felt electric. And when you shifted unconsciously in his lap afterward, his grip tightened for the briefest moment. Not enough to stop you, but enough to make your brain short-circuit.

His eyes darkened instantly.

"Oh, you gotta be kidding me," Leo muttered from somewhere behind you.

Mikey pointed dramatically. "THE CHEMISTRY IS CRAZY."

"Scientifically undeniable," Donnie added.

You finally tore your eyes away from Raph long enough to glare at them. "Are you guys done?"

"No," all three answered immediately.

Raph snorted quietly beneath you, and the vibration of it against your hand almost made things worse. Then his gaze lifted back toward you again. That smirk still there. Completely

unashamed now. And before you could recover properly, he leaned up just enough for his mouth to end up dangerously close to your ear.

“You’re real brave sittin’ on my lap like this,” he murmured.

Your entire body went hot. Because the worst part? He sounded calm. Like he was enjoying watching you slowly realize you might not actually be the one in control here anymore.

The problem was that you had underestimated Raph. Badly. Because teasing him when you thought he’d get embarrassed was one thing. Realizing he actually liked having you on his lap was another entirely. And now you were trapped in the consequences of your own confidence.

Your bravado had started slipping the second his hands settled firmly on your waist, but now it was completely gone. Burned away under the weight of his stare and the way he kept looking at you like he could read every thought crossing your mind. Which, judging by the smugness creeping into his expression, maybe he could.

You finally broke eye contact first. That alone felt humiliating somehow. Your face turned away instinctively, suddenly hyperaware of everything — the heat in your cheeks, the position you were in, the fact everybody else had gone unusually quiet because even they could tell the atmosphere had shifted completely.

Raph noticed immediately. Of course he did.

A low sound rumbled in his chest, almost amused, before one of his hands left your waist. Then his fingers curled gently around your chin. Your breath caught. Slowly, firmly, he turned your face back toward him.

“No, no,” he murmured. “Don’t start gettin’ shy now.”

The words hit harder than they should have. Because his voice had changed again. Still low. Still rough. But calmer now. More confident. Like the second he realized your confidence cracked, something in him straightened instinctively into control.

And honestly? It fit him terrifyingly well.

Your pulse hammered while his thumb rested against your jaw, keeping your head tilted toward him no matter how much your instincts screamed to look away again. Raph leaned back slightly underneath you, broad hands settling once more against your waist while he studied your face with open satisfaction.

“There she is,” he said quietly.

You hated how weak your voice sounded afterward. “Shut up.”

That only made him smirk. Not a cocky grin like Mikey’s. Not smug like Leo got when he won arguments. Raph’s smirk always looked heavier than that. Slower. Like he knew exactly the effect he had and enjoyed watching people react to it.

“You were runnin’ your mouth real nice a minute ago,” he muttered.

Your entire body felt too warm now. The worst part was how easily he handled you physically without even trying. One hand still under your chin. The other spread across your side, thumb brushing absentmindedly against your waist while you sat frozen in his lap trying to recover enough dignity to form an actual comeback.

It wasn’t working. And Raph knew it wasn’t working.

The realization seemed to make his eyes darken slightly. Around you, the room stayed dead silent except for the faint music still humming through the speakers. Even Mikey had stopped talking for once, probably because this no longer felt like normal teasing.

This felt intimate. Dangerously intimate.

You shifted slightly again without meaning to, trying to pull back just enough to breathe properly. Huge mistake. Raph’s grip tightened instantly. Not painful. Never painful. Just enough to stop you from moving away. Your eyes snapped back to his immediately. And there it was again — that look. Focused. Heavy. Like every bit of his attention narrowed directly onto you.

“Uh-uh,” he said softly. “You started this.”

Your stomach flipped so hard it was embarrassing. The size difference suddenly felt overwhelming now that your confidence had abandoned you completely. Sitting on his lap earlier had made you feel victorious for exactly ten seconds before Raph turned the situation around effortlessly.

Because underneath you, he looked completely comfortable. Completely in control. Like having you flustered in his arms was the easiest thing in the world.

One of his thumbs brushed slowly along your jawline while he kept your head tilted toward him, forcing you to maintain eye contact no matter how much you wanted to hide your face somewhere.

“You done actin’ tough?” he asked quietly.

You swallowed hard. Raph noticed that too. God, he noticed everything. His expression softened for the briefest second afterward — not less dominant, not less intense, just… warmer underneath it. Like beneath all the teasing and tension, he was still very aware of you. Of how fast your breathing had become. Of the fact your hands had unconsciously curled into the straps over his chest.

And somehow that made it worse. Because now his voice dropped lower again.

“Cute,” he muttered.

Your brain nearly stopped functioning. “Raph,” you warned weakly.

“What?” His smirk widened faintly. “Now you wanna use my name?”

From somewhere behind you, Leo suddenly groaned loudly into his hands. “Oh my god.”

Mikey whispered back, equally horrified and fascinated, “They’re gonna explode.”

Donnie finally looked up from his tablet. “I believe we are witnessing the biological phenomenon known as unresolved attraction reaching critical mass.”

Neither of you paid attention to them. Couldn’t, really. Not when Raph’s hand was still holding your chin carefully but firmly in place, his face inches from yours now while tension stretched so tight between you it almost hurt.

And for the first time since this started, Raph looked just as affected as you. Still controlled. Still dominant. But affected.

His breathing had deepened slightly. His eyes kept flicking briefly toward your lips before returning to your eyes again like he was forcing himself not to push this further in front of his brothers. Which honestly might have been the only thing saving both of you right now.

Then Raph leaned closer one final inch, voice rough enough to send heat straight down your spine. “You gonna keep starin’ at me like that,” he murmured, “or you gonna finish the fight?”

Chapter 43: “SECRET BATTLES” —ft. MM/totTMNT Raphael

Pipes groaned somewhere overhead, water dripped in uneven rhythms through old rusted tunnels, and faint music echoed from Mikey’s side of the room where he’d clearly fallen asleep without turning anything off again. But compared to the chaos of the day, it was calm enough that every little sound stood out.

Including footsteps. Heavy ones.

You looked up from the couch immediately. The old lamp beside you cast a warm yellow glow across the living area, and for a second all you saw was the entrance tunnel. Then a familiar broad shape emerged from the darkness.

Raph.

He froze the moment he noticed you were still awake. “…Why are you up?”

His voice came out lower than usual, rough with exhaustion. He tried to sound casual, but there was tension sitting under every word.

You slowly sat up straighter on the couch, blanket slipping from your lap. “I could ask you the same thing.”

Raph clicked his tongue softly under his breath.

Even from where you sat, you could see it again. Fresh bruising. One shoulder looked slightly swollen, and there was a dark scrape across the edge of his plastron, just under the strap that held his sai. One of his arms had faint purple marks forming near the elbow. Old bruises mixed with newer ones in layers that didn’t belong on a teenager — mutant turtle or not.

And that was the problem. It kept happening. At first you’d believed the excuses. Training accidents. Sparring too hard. Slipping in the tunnels. Wrestling his brothers. But lately the injuries had become too frequent. Too specific.

Too hidden.

Raph noticed your eyes moving over him and subtly shifted his stance. That alone told you enough.

You softened your voice immediately. “Come here for a second.”

“…M’fine.”

“You say that every time.”

He hesitated. Then, after a second, he trudged over with obvious reluctance, each step heavy against the concrete floor. Up close, the exhaustion was even clearer. His shoulders sagged

beneath the weight of it, and there were tiny cuts along his knuckles that definitely hadn't come from roughhousing with Leo.

You reached out carefully, fingers brushing lightly near the bruise on his arm. Raph flinched before catching himself.

Your expression tightened just slightly. "That hurt."

"No it didn't."

"Raph."

"It's literally nothing."

The defensive edge in his tone arrived instantly, automatic and practiced. He leaned away from your hand, crossing his arms over his plastron like that somehow hid the damage.

Spoiler: it didn't.

You sighed quietly. When the boys were younger, Raph had always been the easiest to read emotionally. Loud feelings, loud reactions. Anger, excitement, embarrassment — everything showed immediately.

But as he got older, he started swallowing things instead. Especially pain. Especially weakness. And for some reason, that hurt worse to watch.

"You've been coming home bruised almost every night," you said gently. "You barely sleep anymore. Sometimes you limp when you think nobody's looking."

"I don't limp."

"You absolutely limp."

"I walk cool."

Despite yourself, you smiled faintly. Raph looked away immediately, like he regretted letting the joke slip out.

The room fell quiet again for a moment. You watched him carefully. The dark circles under his eyes. The stiffness in his shoulders. The way he kept subtly shifting weight off one leg. Whatever he was doing out there was getting worse.

"You know you can tell me things, right?" you asked softly.

His jaw tightened. "I know."

"Then why won't you?"

Raph exhaled hard through his nose, clearly irritated now — not at you, never really at you, but at the conversation itself. At being cornered by concern. "It's not a big deal."

“That doesn’t look like ‘not a big deal.’”

“I can handle it.”

“That’s not what I asked.”

That made him pause. His eyes flickered toward yours for just a second before darting away again.

There it was. That tiny crack.

Raph always wanted to be the strongest person in the room. Even as a kid, he’d stand in front of his brothers during storms like his tiny body could physically fight thunder itself. He carried responsibility like armor, even when nobody asked him to.

And now he was carrying something alone. Again.

You stood slowly from the couch. Raph immediately straightened. “You should go back to sleep.”

“I’m not tired anymore.”

“Yes you are.”

“You came home looking like you lost a fight with a truck.”

“I won.”

You blinked once. “…What?”

Raph froze. His eyes widened just slightly. Then he groaned quietly and dragged a hand down his face. “Forget I said that.”

Your stomach sank. Fight. Actual fights. Not training. Not accidents. Real fights.

“Raph…”

“It’s handled.”

“With who?”

“Nobody.”

“That answer doesn’t even make sense.”

He turned away immediately, already retreating toward the hallway leading to the bedroom area. The movement was too fast, too dismissive. Classic avoidance.

You followed a few steps after him. “Raph.”

“I’m serious, it’s fine.”

“You are covered in bruises.”

“I heal fast.”

“That doesn’t mean I like seeing you hurt.”

That stopped him. Only for a second. His shell rose slightly with a slow inhale before he glanced back over one shoulder. Under the dim lighting, he suddenly looked younger again. Smaller. Not the tough loud oldest brother trying to act invincible.

Just a tired teenager.

“I got it under control,” he muttered.

You crossed your arms lightly. “You said that last week.”

“And I was right.”

“You came home with a cracked shell last week.”

“It was barely cracked.”

“Splinter almost passed out.”

That earned the faintest snort from him. “Yeah, well… dramatic old man.”

You smiled despite your worry. “You love him.”

“Didn’t say I didn’t.”

Another quiet settled between you. Then, carefully, you stepped closer and rested a hand gently against the side of his arm this time, avoiding the bruises.

“You don’t have to carry everything alone,” you said quietly.

Raph looked down at your hand for a long moment. His expression shifted strangely for half a second — guilt mixed with affection mixed with exhaustion. Like part of him wanted to lean into the comfort and another part was already building walls again.

The second part won. “I’m good,” he said, softer this time. “Really.”

You knew he was lying. But you also knew pushing harder tonight would only make him retreat further. So instead, you brushed your thumb lightly over his arm once before letting go.

“Okay,” you murmured. “But I’m still worried.”

His eyes flickered again. Then he shrugged, awkward and defensive all over again. “You worry too much.”

“That’s literally my job.”

That finally pulled a tiny smile out of him. Small. Brief. Crooked. But real.

“Go to sleep,” he muttered.

“You first.”

“Nah.”

“Raph.”

He started backing toward the boys’ room. “Night.”

“Goodnight.”

He disappeared down the hallway before you could say anything else. A moment later you heard the muffled sound of him entering the bedroom he shared with his brothers, followed immediately by Leo’s half-asleep complaining.

“Bro why are you so loud—”

“Shut up.”

“You shut u—”

A pillow hit someone. Probably Leo. Then Mikey laughed deliriously in his sleep for absolutely no reason.

You stood there for a while longer in the dim light, staring toward the hallway. Still worried. Because beneath the bruises, the exhaustion, and all the dismissive answers… something felt wrong. And whatever Raph was hiding, it was getting harder for him to carry alone.

…

The first thing you noticed was that Raph waited. That alone told you he was hiding something. Normally, when the lair quieted down for the night, all four boys eventually crashed wherever exhaustion caught them. Leo sprawled sideways across his mattress. Donnie halfway hanging off his bed with headphones still on. Mikey asleep under piles of comics.

And Raph? Raph usually stayed awake the longest, but not like this. Not alert. Not listening.

You watched from the hallway corner as he sat near the living room entrance, elbows resting against his knees, fingers tapping slowly against the handle of one sai. Waiting for something. Or maybe waiting for everyone else to fully fall asleep.

You stayed hidden long enough to see him glance toward Splinter’s room. Then toward the hallway. Then he stood. Quietly. Too quietly for someone his size. Your chest tightened immediately. He slipped out of the lair without a sound. And you followed him.

The walk through the city felt wrong from the start. Raph moved through New York like he'd memorized every hidden route possible. Rooftops. Fire escapes. Back alleys. Sewer exits. He didn't hesitate once. Which meant this wasn't new.

You stayed far enough behind that he wouldn't notice, your hoodie pulled low over your face, heart beating harder the longer this went on.

At one point he dropped down into an abandoned subway tunnel entrance hidden behind a fenced construction area. That was when your stomach really started sinking. Because you could hear it now.

Cheering. Loud cheering. The sound echoed up through the tunnels like a wave.

Raph disappeared below. You followed carefully after him. And then you saw it. The underground station had been transformed into something almost unreal — floodlights hanging from rusted beams, graffiti covering every wall, massive speakers blasting music loud enough to shake the floor beneath your shoes.

Mutants. Everywhere.

Some large enough to tower over everyone else. Some reptilian. Some insect-like. Some you couldn't even fully identify before they disappeared into the crowd again. And in the center of it all—

A fighting ring.

Your stomach dropped. "No…"

People shoved past you toward the lower levels, shouting excitedly. Betting. Laughing. Chanting names. You barely managed to keep moving. The air smelled like concrete, sweat, metal, and something sharp underneath it all — blood, probably.

Then you noticed the purple banners hanging above the ring. Purple Dragons. Of course. Near the center platform stood a familiar woman leaning lazily against the railing, sharp grin illuminated by neon lights.

Kitsune.

Even from a distance, she looked completely in control of the entire place. She spoke into a microphone with smooth confidence while the crowd roared around her.

"So you losers ready for tonight's main event or what?"

The crowd erupted instantly.

You felt sick. This wasn't some occasional sparring thing. This was organized. And then you heard it.

"RAPH! RAPH! RAPH! RAPH!"

The chanting hit you like ice water. Your head snapped toward the tunnel entrance beside the arena. And there he was. Raph walked out beneath the lights with a familiar guarded expression, shoulders squared like he was forcing himself bigger than he actually was. The crowd exploded the second they saw him.

People knew him. Not casually, either. They knew him. Mutants leaned over railings shouting his name. Some banged fists against the barriers. Others laughed excitedly like they'd been waiting specifically for him.

Your chest twisted painfully. He'd been doing this for a while. Long enough to become popular here. Long enough to become expected.

Raph climbed into the ring without hesitation. Under the harsh lights, the bruises on him became even more obvious. Old scars across his plastron. Fading marks near the edge of his shell. Tape wrapped around one wrist.

He rolled his shoulders once, jaw tight. And despite everything he looked happy, excited and focused. Like this had become the most exciting thing.

You stared at him from beneath your hood, barely breathing. This was where he'd been disappearing to every night. This was why he came home bruised and exhausted. This was why he kept hiding his pain.

Kitsune's grin widened as she lifted the mic again. "And tonight, everybody's favorite snapping turtle is facing someone new."

The crowd roared louder. Raph frowned immediately. That wasn't a good sign. From the opposite side of the arena, heavy footsteps echoed through the station.

Slow. Massive.

The entire crowd reacted instantly, excitement turning almost feral. Then the mutant appeared. Your breath caught: he was enormous.

At least a head taller than Raph and twice as wide, with thick gray skin stretched over layers of muscle and huge jagged horns curving from his forehead. Every step made the ring shake slightly beneath him.

Raph visibly stiffened. He hadn't expected this either.

Kitsune sounded delighted. "Aww, what's wrong, Red? Nervous?"

Raph rolled one shoulder. "Nah. Just wondering if he can fit through the exit when I'm done."

The crowd screamed. Even now, he joked. Even now.

The larger mutant cracked his neck once. Then, before Raph could even properly settle into position—

He charged. Fast. Way too fast for something that size.

“Raph—!”

The word almost escaped your mouth. The mutant slammed directly into him before he could fully dodge, and the sound of shell hitting concrete echoed horribly through the arena.

The crowd LOST IT.

Raph hit the ground hard enough to slide across the ring. Your heart stopped. For one awful second, he didn’t move. Then he pushed himself up immediately with a grunt, breathing harder already. The larger mutant didn’t even give him time to recover.

Another hit. A massive fist collided with Raph’s side and threw him against the ropes.

You physically flinched. “Oh my God…”

Nobody else reacted like this was wrong. Nobody. They screamed louder every time someone got hurt. People laughed. Cheered. Slammed drinks against the railings.

Meanwhile you could barely breathe.

Raph blocked another hit with both arms, feet skidding backward across the floor under the force of it. Pain flashed across his face for half a second before he buried it immediately beneath anger. He lunged back hard. Fast punches. Brutal strength. Sharp movements. He fought like someone used to surviving.

But the other mutant was bigger. Heavier. And every time Raph got hit, your entire body tensed instinctively. At one point the mutant grabbed him by the shoulder straps and slammed him straight into the ring floor.

You nearly stood up. “Stop—”

The word came out under your breath. Your hands gripped the railing so hard your knuckles hurt.

Raph coughed sharply, struggling back upright again while the crowd screamed his name like this was entertainment. And the worst part? He looked exhausted already. Like he’d been doing this over and over and over until his body barely kept up anymore.

The larger mutant raised a fist again. Raph barely got his arms up in time. The impact echoed through the entire station. And suddenly you understood why he always came home limping. Why he hid bruises beneath attitude and sarcasm. Why he avoided your questions.

Because if you saw this, or Splinter…then none of you would ever let him come back.

But as you watched him stagger slightly before forcing himself upright again, breathing hard beneath the arena lights, one thought drowned out everything else. He was still just a kid. No matter how hard he tried to act otherwise.

The sound of Raph getting slammed into the ropes again finally snapped something in you. Up until now, you had been frozen in place among the screaming crowd, fingers clenched so tightly around the railing that your hands hurt, trying to convince yourself to stay calm. Trying to think rationally. Trying not to panic every single time that giant mutant landed another hit on him. But it became impossible the moment Raph stumbled after a punch and almost failed to catch his footing. He recovered fast — too fast, automatically straightening his shoulders and throwing himself back into the fight before anyone could notice the split second of imbalance — but you noticed. Of course you noticed. You'd helped raise him. You knew every expression, every posture, every tiny shift in movement. You knew when he was hurt even when he was trying to act invincible.

And right now? He was exhausted. Not weak. Not incapable. But exhausted in the way teenagers got when they pushed themselves far past what they should have been carrying alone.

The mutant charged again, huge fists swinging toward him, and that was it. You shoved forward through the crowd before your brain could catch up with the decision. Mutants yelled in annoyance as you pushed past them, some spilling drinks while others cursed at you for blocking their view, but you barely heard any of it over the pounding in your ears. The arena lights burned your eyes as you climbed over the barricade and dropped down toward the ring floor, your shoes hitting the concrete hard enough to sting.

"HEY!" you shouted.

The word tore out louder than you expected. The fight paused for half a second. Raph's head snapped toward you immediately. And the expression on his face—

Pure horror.

"What are you DOING?!" he barked.

You ignored him completely and pointed furiously toward the giant mutant. "This fight is over!"

The arena instantly erupted into boos. People screamed complaints from the stands while others laughed like this was the funniest thing they'd seen all night. Somewhere above, music screeched to a stop with ugly feedback before Kitsune's amused voice echoed through the microphone again.

"Well, well," she purred. "Looks like our champ brought a fan."

The crowd laughed.

You glared upward toward her platform. "He's hurt!"

Kitsune rested her chin lazily against one hand as she looked down at you with sharp amusement glowing in her eyes. "Yeah. That's generally how fighting works."

Raph groaned loudly from behind you. "Oh my God…"

You turned around sharply toward him, lowering your voice only slightly. “You lied to me.”

“You followed me!”

“Because you keep coming home covered in bruises!”

“It’s handled!”

“You are literally bleeding!”

Raph immediately wiped at the corner of his mouth with the back of his hand like that somehow fixed the argument. “It’s not that much blood.”

“Raph—”

“Aw,” Kitsune interrupted smoothly through the speakers. “Family drama. Cute.”

You spun around again, furious now. “I’m serious! Stop the fight!”

Instead of answering, Kitsune’s grin widened. Then she lifted the microphone higher. “Guess we got ourselves a surprise tag match tonight!”

The crowd exploded instantly.

Your stomach dropped. “What?! No!”

“Oh, come on,” Kitsune teased. “You already entered the ring.”

“I’m not a fighter!”

“That sounds quitter-ish.”

“I’m HUMAN!”

Kitsune shrugged lazily. “No rules, sweetheart.”

The audience screamed approval. You stared at her in disbelief while Raph muttered something that sounded very close to a genuine curse under his breath. When you turned toward him again, he already looked furious — not at the arena, not even at Kitsune.

At you.

His nostrils flared slightly as he stepped closer, shorter than you but somehow still managing to radiate enough irritation to fill the entire ring. Up close, under the harsh lights, he looked even younger than he had from the stands. Still broad-shouldered, still tough, but clearly a teenager beneath all the bruises and attitude. Sweat glistened across his green skin, cuts scattered over his plastron and arms from previous fights, chest heaving slightly from exertion.

“You should NOT be here” he snapped.

“You think I was just gonna sit there and watch you get beaten half to death?!”

“I was WINNING!”

“You got thrown across the ring twice!”

“That doesn’t mean I was LOSING!”

Before you could continue arguing, the giant mutant let out an impatient roar and lunged forward again. Everything happened at once. Raph reacted instantly.

“MOVE!”

His hand slammed against your shoulder hard enough to shove you sideways just as the mutant crashed toward you both. The force of it rattled the floor beneath your feet. Raph intercepted the attack head-on, crossing his arms to block before getting driven backward several feet across the concrete.

You saw the pain flash across his face. He hid it immediately. But you saw it.

Raph dug his heels into the ground with a growl, muscles straining beneath his shell as he forced the mutant back just enough to break away. The second he did, he turned toward you again looking absolutely livid.

“I HAD THAT.”

“You absolutely did not!”

“You could’ve gotten hurt!”

That almost made you laugh out loud considering the situation. “Oh, so NOW you care about safety?”

“I ALWAYS care about your safety!”

The words came out instantly. Loud. Defensive. Completely genuine. Raph froze for half a second after saying it. So did you.

And before either of you could react to that emotionally devastating little confession, the mutant charged again. This time you moved first. Splinter didn’t have you around four mutant ninja turtles without teaching you how to defend yourself. Your body reacted automatically, years of training kicking in as you ducked beneath the mutant’s swing and drove your elbow sharply into the side of his ribs. Pain shot up your arm immediately — it was like punching a wall — but it distracted him long enough for Raph to recover.

Raph blinked once. “…Oh.”

You glared at him while backing away from another swing. “Did you forget I know ninjutsu?!”

“I kinda did?!”

“RUDE!”

The mutant roared again and swung toward you. Raph intercepted immediately. Fast. Too fast. One second the fist was heading toward your face and the next Raph had physically thrown himself between you and the hit, taking the impact against his shell with a harsh grunt before slamming his shoulder directly into the mutant’s stomach.

The crowd went insane. “RAPH! RAPH! RAPH!”

You barely heard them. Because all you could focus on was the fact that he had protected you without hesitation. Again. Even hurt. Even exhausted. Even angry at you. Raph shoved the mutant backward before immediately grabbing your wrist and pulling you out of the way of another attack. His hand was rough and warm against yours, grip tight enough to make sure you stayed behind him.

“Stay close,” he muttered.

You stared at him. Then at the giant mutant currently recovering across the ring. Then back at him.

“…You realize I’m taller than you, right?”

Raph looked offended immediately. “This is NOT the time.”

Despite everything, you snorted. Then the mutant charged again. And suddenly the two of you were fighting together. Messy. Loud. Chaotic. Completely unplanned.

You ducked beneath swings while Raph launched himself onto the mutant’s back like an angry snapping turtle-shaped missile, sai flashing beneath the arena lights as he fought with brutal efficiency. Meanwhile you used speed where Raph used strength, landing quick strikes when openings appeared and helping drag him out of the way whenever the larger mutant tried grabbing him outright.

The entire time, the arguing never stopped.

“You followed me into an ILLEGAL FIGHT RING!”

“You are FIFTEEN!”

“THAT’S NOT THE POINT!”

“You could’ve DIED!”

“I WAS FINE!”

“You have a cracked shell!”

“IT’S HEALING!”

Raph blocked another massive punch before immediately shoving you backward away from danger again. “Would you stop getting close to him?!”

“You stop getting punched!”

“I’m TRYING!”

Even while yelling, he kept checking where you were. Constantly. Every few seconds his eyes darted toward you to make sure you were still okay, still standing, still out of reach whenever the mutant attacked. Protective instinct bled into every movement he made. Positioning himself between you and danger automatically. Taking hits he didn’t need to. Grabbing your arm to pull you clear before you even noticed an attack coming.

By the end of the fight, neither of you looked good. Raph was breathing hard enough that every inhale visibly expanded his plastron, sweat dripping down the side of his face while fresh bruises darkened across his arms and shoulders. One side of his shell had a nasty scrape from getting slammed into the arena wall earlier, and his wrist tape was half unraveled now, hanging loose after the constant grabbing and blocking. Meanwhile your entire body ached from head to toe. Your hoodie sleeve had torn near the elbow at some point during the fight, your legs burned from dodging nonstop, and you were pretty sure your shoulder was going to bruise horribly by morning after getting clipped by one of the mutant’s swings.

But somehow, despite all that—
You and Raph were winning.

Mostly because the two of you worked together far better than either of you wanted to admit.

The giant mutant swung toward you again with enough force to crack concrete if it landed, but this time you were already expecting it. You ducked low beneath the punch while shouting, “NOW!”

Raph reacted instantly. He launched himself forward with a sharp yell, using the mutant’s distracted position to slam directly into his side with all his weight. Even smaller than the other fighter, Raph hit like an actual truck when he committed fully. The mutant staggered sideways, balance finally breaking after the constant teamwork wearing him down.

You didn’t hesitate. Years of Splinter’s training kicked in automatically as you swept the mutant’s legs hard from underneath him while Raph shoved forward again at the exact same time.

The larger mutant crashed backward. Hard.

The entire arena shook from the impact. For one second, everything froze. Then the crowd absolutely exploded. The screaming became deafening instantly. Stomping feet, shouting, chants echoing through the underground station so loudly the metal beams overhead vibrated with it. Somewhere above, Kitsune was laughing through the microphone like this entire disaster had been the greatest entertainment she’d ever seen.

Raph stood there panting heavily beside you, staring at the fallen mutant while adrenaline still coursed through him hard enough to make his hands shake slightly. Then the mutant groaned once and stayed down.

The referee mutant slammed something metallic against the ring floor. “MATCH OVER!”

The crowd lost their minds. People screamed Raph’s name again immediately. “RAPH! RAPH! RAPH!”

Others started shouting about “the human girl” while pointing toward you excitedly like you’d somehow become part of the entertainment too. You absolutely hated that.

Raph, meanwhile, looked one second away from collapsing. He rolled his shoulders once with a grimace, then wiped sweat from his face with the back of his arm before glancing toward you. “You good?”

You stared at him in disbelief. “You’re asking ME that?”

“You got hit less.”

“That’s because you kept throwing yourself in front of me!”

“Well, yeah.” he said it like it was obvious. Like there had never been another option.

Your chest tightened again despite the fact that you were still furious with him.

Raph noticed your expression and immediately looked away instead, rubbing awkwardly at the back of his neck. “Okay, don’t make it weird.”

“You are literally injured.”

“I’ve BEEN injured.”

“You could’ve died!”

“I didn’t though.”

“That’s not comforting!”

The crowd kept cheering around you, but at this point neither of you were paying attention anymore. Raph bent to grab one of his sai from the floor, muttering under his breath as he adjusted the strap against his plastron. “You still shouldn’t have followed me.”

“And you still shouldn’t be secretly fighting underground mutants for fun!”

“It’s not for fun.”

The answer came too fast. Too honest.

You blinked. Raph froze immediately after saying it, jaw tightening. For the first time since arriving here, he suddenly looked genuinely uncomfortable. Not angry. Not defensive.

Just… exposed. Like he regretted letting that truth slip out.

You softened slightly despite yourself. “Then why?”

He avoided your eyes instantly. “Doesn’t matter.”

“Raph—”

“It’s done, okay?”

Before you could push further, Kitsune’s voice echoed through the speakers again. “Our winners everybody!”

The crowd roared once more. Raph visibly cringed. You took advantage of his distraction immediately by grabbing the edge of his wrist and tugging him toward the ring exit. “Nope. We’re leaving.”

“What— hey—”

“You are done fighting tonight.”

“I can still go another rou—”

“No.”

Raph groaned dramatically while stumbling after you. “You sound like Splinter.”

“Good.”

“That’s an insult somehow.”

“You literally have blood on your face.”

“It’s decorative.”

“You’re unbelievable.”

“And you punched a mutant in the throat.”

“I had to improvise!”

“You kinda cooked though.”

Despite everything, you barked out a tired laugh. Raph noticed instantly. Then he grinned. Not the forced cocky smirk he used in the ring. Not the defensive attitude he wore whenever he was hiding things. A real grin. Bright. Teenage. Slightly stupid.

It lasted only a second before he tried pretending he hadn’t smiled at all. Unfortunately for him, you’d helped raise him. You noticed everything.

The walk back through the tunnels was slower than before, mostly because both of you were exhausted enough to barely keep functioning. Your legs felt heavy, Raph limped slightly no matter how much he tried hiding it, and every now and then one of you hissed when bruised muscles moved the wrong way.

The argument continued anyway.

“You seriously could’ve gotten hurt.”

“Oh my God, YOU got hurt!”

“Yeah, but I’m trained for this.”

“So am I!”

“You’re human!”

“And you’re fifteen pounds of attitude wrapped in reptile skin!”

Raph looked genuinely offended. “I weigh MORE than fifteen pounds.”

“Barely.”

“RUDE.”

You rolled your eyes while climbing up another rusted ladder toward street level. “You are literally shorter than me.”

“That has NEVER mattered in a fight.”

“You still needed saving.”

“I absolutely did not!”

“You got body-slammed into a wall!”

“And then I won!”

“We won.”

Raph opened his mouth immediately, then paused. “…Yeah,” he admitted quietly.

The softer tone caught you off guard. He glanced away right after saying it, almost embarrassed by the honesty. Streetlights illuminated the side of his face as the two of you finally emerged into the cool night air aboveground, both sweaty and bruised and exhausted beyond belief.

For a while, neither of you spoke. The city was quieter this late. Cars passed occasionally in the distance, neon lights reflecting off damp sidewalks while the night breeze cooled the sweat sticking to your skin.

Then Raph suddenly muttered, “You still shouldn’t have followed me.”

You stared at him flatly for two seconds before yanking your hoodie off and throwing it directly at his face.

Raph made a deeply offended noise as the fabric smacked against him. “OH, okay. Violence. Cool.”

“You’re impossible.”

“You threw clothing at a minor.”

That one caught you off guard hard enough that you actually laughed. Not a tired exhale. A real laugh. Raph blinked once. Then he started laughing too. It came out rough and exhausted at first before turning louder, shoulders shaking slightly while he clutched your hoodie dramatically against his plastron like you’d mortally wounded him. The sound echoed through the empty street, stupid and genuine and painfully normal after everything that had happened.

And suddenly the tension cracked completely. The two of you kept arguing the entire walk home, but now it dissolved into playful shoving and tired banter instead of genuine anger. Raph kept insisting he “totally had the fight handled,” while you kept reminding him he nearly got folded in half twice. At one point he dramatically imitated your horrified expression from the audience, which led to you threatening to throw him into the Hudson.

By the time you reached the lair entrance, both of you were grinning despite the bruises. Then you walked inside. And immediately froze. The entire family was awake. Leo sat on the couch holding a game controller halfway to his chest. Mikey was upside down over the armrest eating shredded cheese directly from the bag. Donnie looked up from a tablet. Splinter stood near the kitchen area holding a mug of tea.

Silence hit the room instantly. Everyone stared. At your torn clothes. At the sweat. At the bruises. At Raph’s scraped shell. At the fact it was the middle of the night.

Mikey blinked slowly. “…Did you guys kill somebody?”

Leo pointed at you both immediately. “I KNEW IT.”

Donnie adjusted his glasses while narrowing his eyes. Splinter slowly lowered his tea. Raph immediately stopped smiling. You did too. And for one terrible second, both of you just stood there looking caught beyond repair.

Then Splinter spoke. “…Raph.”

Raph straightened instantly. “…Yeah?”

Another long silence. Splinter looked toward you next. Then back at Raph. Then at the bruises again. “…Why do you both smell like underground wrestling men?”

The room exploded. Leo screamed laughing. Mikey fell off the couch. Donnie nearly choked. And despite the absolute disaster waiting to happen next, Raph burst out laughing again beside you.

Chapter 44: BAYVERSE X fem!reader — NSFW

you are trying to get something from the shelf behind the couch where leo's sitting, not realising that as you reach for the stuff, your breasts practically spill onto his face. he freezes, his eyes widening at the view of your tits and before you could even react, his snout is nuzzling into your cleavage like a wild animal.

—leo..?

—shhh…—he hushes you, not moving away.

instead, his hands come up to hold your hips as he just breathes you in, having his face buried between your breasts. you bite your lip and look down at him; he looks up at you with hungry eyes. he doesn't even pretend to be innocent or sum, he just smirks and leans forward, his tongue flicking out to lick a stripe up your left nipple.

—you're just putting these right in my face, what am i supposed to do? —he sucks your nipple into his mouth while his hands squeeze your ass.

your soft moans only encourage leo, as he keeps sucking harder, while his cheeks hollow out. his hands slide up to squeeze your breasts as he devours your nipple like a starving baby. the sound of wet sucking fills the room, along with your soft whimpers.

leo continues to suck your breasts while having his eyes locked onto yours. he's so focused on titty-feeding that he doesn't even notice donnie and raph entering the room until donnie clears his throat loudly.

—hey guys —leo pulls back as your nipple pops out of his mouth with a wet sound.

donnie's jaw drops as his eyes immediately lock onto your exposed breasts and your nipple glistening with leo's saliva. raph growls, clenching his hands into fists at his sides.

—you just gonna stand there and let him eat your tits like that? —raph demands with a rough voice. leo just smirks, holding your hips possessively. then raph pushes leo aside roughly and sits down on the couch, tugging you onto his lap so your tits are now in his face instead. He doesn't even wait; he just takes your right nipple into his mouth and starts sucking hard—. it's not fair that Leo gets first dibs just cause she dropped 'em on him.

your cute moans go straight to raph's dick, making it twitch in his shell. he bites down gently on your nipple as a punishment for being so damn adorable. meanwhile, donnie looks torn between joining in or scolding them, but then, mikey chooses that moment to run into the room.

—guys, I'm hungry-…

mikey stops in his tracks, his eyes widening as he takes in the scene: you sitting on raph's lap while your tits are bouncing with every suck and leo and raph both marking up your pale skin

with hickies and bites.

—holy fuck, are you guys eating her tits?

—she’s just standing here with these perfect tits, what did you expect us to do? —leo smirks unapologetically.

—she moans so fucking sweetly when we suck 'em —raph growls around your nipple.

then mikey abandons any thought of food and shoves his way onto the couch next to raph.

—can I have one? -he whines, reaching for your left breast. raph growls but doesn't stop sucking, just moves his head so mikey can latch onto your other nipple.

donnie finally gives in and climbs onto the couch behind you, pulling you back against his plastron. his arms wrap around your waist, holding you in place as the other three turtles continue to feast on your tits like they're starving. donnie leans down to press soft kisses against your shoulder and neck. he hums happily against your neck at how naturally you fit against him like this. his hands slide up your sides carefully, avoiding the other turtles' heads but still managing to stroke your sensitive skin.

—she’a not complaining because she likes it —raph says confidently, pulling back with a wet pop before diving back in. mikey and leo both nod in agreement around mouthfuls of tit flesh while donnie kisses your cheek gently— see?

the room fills with the wet sounds of sucking and slurping as the four turtles take turns feasting on your breasts. donnies hands slowly inch up to cup your tits, helping them bounce and jiggle for his brothers' enjoyment.

Donnie's warm breath against your ear sends shivers down your spine as he whispers,

—wanna see something cool? —donnie’s warm breath against your ear sends shivers down your spine as he whispers. without waiting for your response, he gently pushes your tits together, creating a deep cleavage valley. the other turtles pause—. open wide, boys.

the other three open their mouths wide obediently and Donnie carefully guides your pushed-together tits into their open mouths. they all start sucking immediately, while their lips seal around your cleavage. you gasp at the strange but pleasurable feeling, throwing your head back against donnie’s shoulder.

—fuck yeah, look at that —donnie groans softly, watching his brothers suckle your cleavage like a nursing baby.

your moans turn them on even more and they start fighting gently for position, trying to get more of your boobs in their mouths. leo pulls back first, but he immediately dives back in, although this time he pushes his face between your breasts, burying his snout in your cleavage and inhaling deeply. donnie feels you trembling against him and chuckles softly. he squeezes your breasts gently, making them squish and jiggle for the others.

—she’s shaking —he hums approvingly. raph notices first, letting go of your nipple and looking up with dark eyes.

—she’s close —he growls—. keep her like that.

donnie follows raphs order, holding your tits together and keeping leo’s face buried in your cleavage. mikey starts sucking harder on your right nipple, trying to match the intensity of the others. raph starts licking a stripe up your left breast, ending with a rough bite on your collarbone.

the whole overwhelming stimulation makes your legs shake. donnie’s eyes light up as he sees your legs squeezing together, since he knows exactly what that means.

—guys, she's about to cum —he whispers excitedly. leo’s face vibrates with happiness between your breasts as he sniffles and sucks on your deep cleavage while raph growls.

the moment you cum, your breasts bounce and shake violently in their mouths. leo makes a surprised but happy noise, burying his face deeper in your cleavage to ride out your orgasm while raph and mikey keep sucking hard on your nipples, extending your pleasure. donnie catches you easily, wrapping his arms around your waist to support you as you fall back against his chest. he presses soft kisses to your forehead and cheeks, smiling down at you gently.

—good girl —he coos softly as the other turtles continue to play with your breasts.

Chapter 45: BAYVERSE RAPH x Fem!reader — NSFW

Raph had one arm thrown around your waist while the other was lazily drummed against the mattress beneath him; he was half-sprawled cross the bed like he owned the whole thing (which, to be honest, he did, since that was his bed).

—You're takin' up too much space —he grumbled, nudging your leg with his.

—Raph, you're literally built like a damn truck —you snorted—. Trust me the bed is fighting for its life right now.

—Hey! The bed loves me.

—The bed fears you —you laughed softly.

—Keep talkin' like that and i'm throwing you off —he barked out a laugh before narrowing his eyes playfully at you.

—You wouldn't survive ten minutes without me —you winked at him.

—Please —he pulled you closer against his plastron—, you're obsessed with me.

—Oh, absolutely tragic for me —you said playfully.

—Damn right —Raph smirked, lowering his head enough to bump his forehead against yours softly—. The good thing is that i'm also obsessed with you.

You smirked, lifting your gaze from his lips to his eyes, biting your lower lip. Then you switched your position, just to end up sitting on his lap. He moved his arm from your waist just to place it on your thigh, looking up at you and mimicking your smirk.

—Did i hear right? are you obsessed with me? —you looked down at him as you placed both of your hands on his plastron.

—Damn right you did —he growled, squeezing your thigh—. But "obsessed" doesn't completely describe it. It's more like i'm hungry for you —his hands find your hips now as his thumb strokes the skin there.

—They why don't you show me how hungry you're for me?~ Just so that i believe you.

—You want proof, sweetheart? —his hands slide from your hips to the lower part of your back, pulling you against him—. Then feel this —he takes one of your hands and place it on his growing bulge.

You look down at his pants and bite your lip harder, looking then into his eyes with a fake shyness.

—Nah, keep going —he says in a demanding tone, while his free hand clenches your hip and pulls you deeper into his lap, grinding into your touch—, show me how much you want it.

You grab his cock through the pants and start stroking it slowly, while your eyes never leave his. His head drops to rest against your shoulder as he struggles to keep his gaze locked onto yours.

—Fuck…—his hips jerk involuntarily into your hand while the thick length beneath the pants grows harder with every deliberate stroke—. Don't stop…fuck, don't stop looking at me like that.

You quicken your pace, stroking his cock faster as you keep looking at him, licking your lips.

—Does this feel good, daddy?

—Yeah baby girl —he groans, his head falling back as you keep stroking him through his pants—. Just like that…you know just how to touch daddy's cock —he spreads his legs wider, giving you more room to work—. Keep talkin' dirty to me, princess.

—Just warn me when you're close, I want you to cum in my mouth —you say, rubbing his tip with your thumb through the pants.

—Fuck princess —he hisses while his hips buck up into your touch—. You really want daddy to cum into that pretty mouth of yours? —he grabs your hair, guiding your head to his shoulder as he starts bumping up into your strokes—. I'm close baby girl, really fucking close.

You stop your hand as soon as he mentions being close, smirking against his shoulder. As much as you wanted him to cum inside your mouth, you always took time to tease a bit.

—You little-…—he grabs a fistful of your hair as you stop touching him. His cock throbs painfully against your ass, trapped inside his pants—. Finish what you started. I said i was close.

His thighs tense under you, fighting against the urge to jerk his hips up for friction because he knows you'll just stop again. You, meanwhile, haven't moved your hand and your smirk was still on your face as you looked into his eyes with a playful expression.

—Hmmmm, I don't think i want~

—Fucking hell princess —he groans while his face is contorting in frustration—. You better watch yourself. Keep teasing me and see if I don't fuck your pretty mouth without warning.

—And who tells you that's not what I want? —you licked your lips.

—Smart mouth on you, baby. You might get more than you bargained for —he grips your hips hard enough to leave a bruise, flipping you suddenly onto your back on the bed. His weight pins you down as he yanks his cock free from his pants; hard, thick and leaking precum—. Open.

You look up at him and keep your mouth closed, as keeping teasing him.

—Fucking open your mouth —he snarls, grabbing your jaw and squeezing hard enough to hurt—. I'm not asking again; either you open that smart little mouth and let daddy fuck it, or i'll fuck your throat until you choke.

Okay, that was so hot and that's what made you finally open your mouth a little, your eyes never leaving him. He growls in satisfaction as he sees your mouth open slightly. He doesn't give you chance to close it again; he just presses the head of his massive cock against your lips, spreading them apart as he pushes inside firmly, not stopping until he reaches the back of your throat.

—Fuck..—you gag and he looks down at you, holding his cock deep in your throat—. That's it babygirl, you wanted daddy's cock? you're getting it —he pulls back slowly before slamming back in, setting a brutal pace as he starts fucking your face rough and hard—. No teeth.

You let out choked moans as you keep your mouth wide open for him; your eyes start watering every time he hit your throat with the tip of his cock.

—Goddamn princess —he groans, watching your eyes water and spit dribble down your chin. He loves you seeing you like this: completely at his mercy. He picks up the pace, fucking your throat even harder as his balls slap against your face with each thrust—. You're taking it so good —he praises with a voice strained by pleasure. He then reaches down and grabs your hair, using it to control your head as he fucks your throat relentlessly—. Look up at me while I use your pretty mouth.

You look up at him as he orders you to do it, gagging with each thrust.

—Fuckin' hell, you're gorgeous like this —his eyes lock onto yours as he pounds your throat. He suddenly pulls out, giving you a split second to breathe before he shoves his balls into your mouth—. Suck.

You close your eyes as you now start sucking on his balls, gripping the sheets while tears run down the side of your head. Raph grinds his balls deeper in your mouth, loving how obediently you're taking this.

—Such a good girl you are when you wanna be —he slides one hand down to squeeze your throat, feeling the wetness of your saliva.

You keep on sucking his balls, moaning chokingly when he squeezes your throat and trying to gasp for air, but he squeezes it harder, cutting your most of your air. His other hand gets to grab your hair and yank your head slightly up.

—Who's in charge, baby? —he snarls while his face is contorted with lust— I am.

You start shaking for air, gripping both of his wrists as you even stop sucking him, looking up at him.

—Fuck, look at you —he groans, finally releasing your throat from both his balls and his hand.

You immediately start coughing and gagging for air. But the sight of you like this makes his cock throb painfully, so he shoves it back into your mouth without warning. He fucks your mouth brutally, using your hair and throat to control you. He hits the back of your throat over and over, making you choke and gag on his length.

Suddenly he freezes, his cock swelling even more.

—Fuck princess…i'm gonna cum..and you're gonna swallow every fucking drop —he growls while his grip on your hair tightens and he starts thrusting erratically. His cum shoots out in thick ropes, coasting your tongue and throat—. Swallow baby, swallow daddy's cum.

You close your eyes as you swallow every drop, licking his tip clean after he pulls out of your mouth.

—Look at me —he orders with a softer voice now. You look up at him and he strokes your cheek gently this time—. So fucking beautiful —he mumbles as his thumb brushes against your swollen lips—. You look like a mess, my mess —he then leans down and kisses you roughly despite his earlier softer tone. He tastes himself on your lips, his tongue pushing inside possessively—. Good girl.

He breaks the kiss, resting his forehead against yours. His hand moves from your cheek to wrap around your neck, squeezing it gently this time.

—You take orders so well —he whispers with a low and satisfied voice—. I think you were made for this.

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